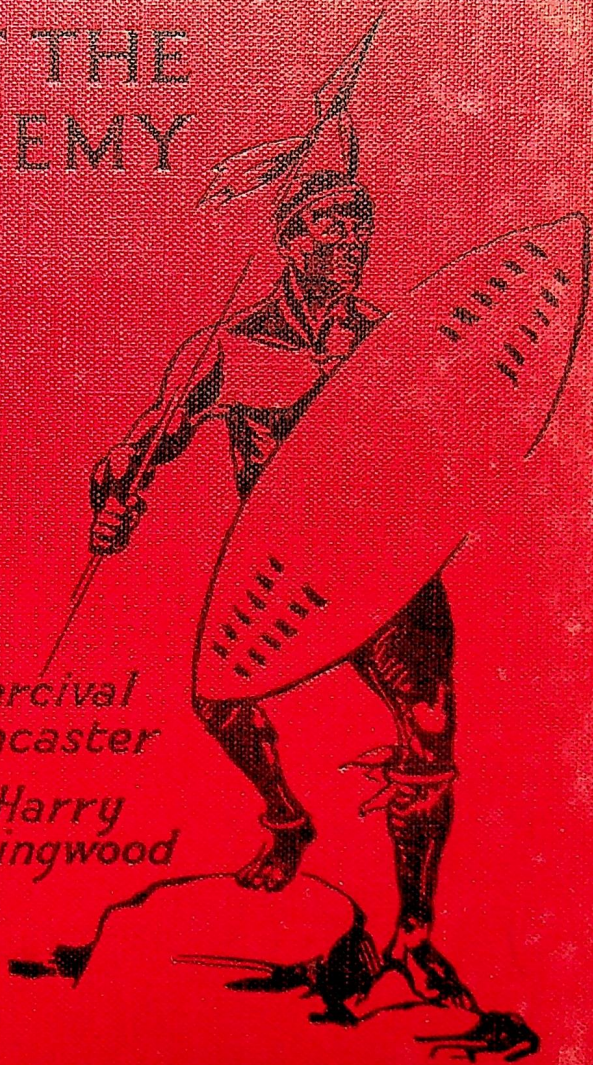


IN THE POWER OF THE ENEMY

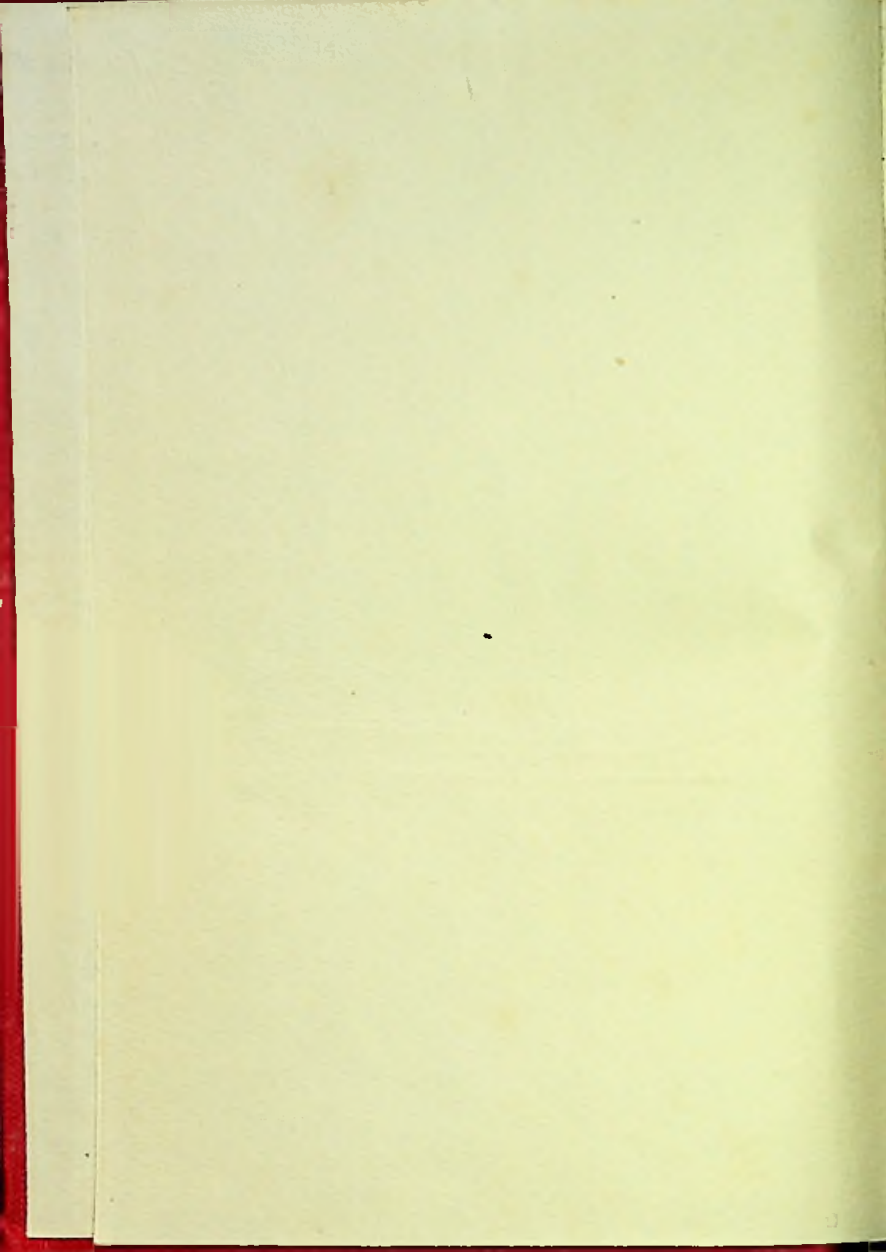
By
Percival
Lancaster
& Harry
Collingwood





"ALTHOUGH I TRIED TO DEFEND THE YOUNG MASTER, THE MAN WAS STRONGER THAN I, AND HE CUT ME DOWN WITH HIS SJAMBOK."





IN THE POWER OF THE ENEMY



HIS ATTENTION WAS ARRESTED BY A CLOUD OF DUST.

IN THE POWER OF THE ENEMY

BY
PERCIVAL LANCASTER

AUTHOR OF
"CAPTAIN JACK O'HARA, R.N." "THE SHIP OF SILENCE," ETC.

AND
HARRY COLLINGWOOD

AUTHOR OF
"UNDER A FOREIGN FLAG."
"IN SEARCH OF EL DORADO."

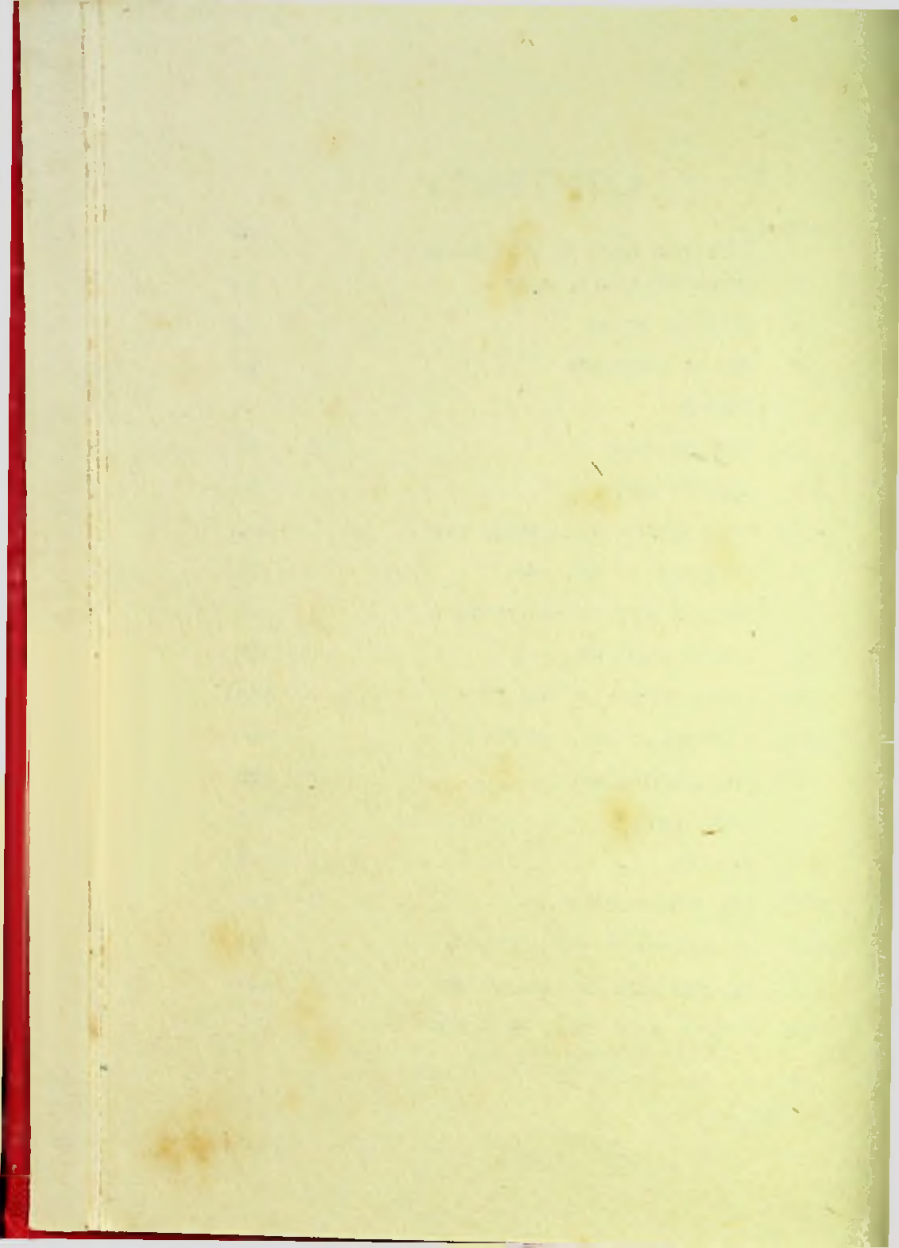


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IN THE POWER OF THE ENEMY

CHAPTER I

"IN THE DARK OF THE MOON"

"PHEW!" soliloquised Hugh Marchmont as he opened the door of his four-roomed bungalow at Katana, and looked out into the night—— "What an abominable evening for a ride! I don't remember ever to have seen it so dark before. Why, it's literally impossible to see a yard in front of one; and if Jack were not expecting me I certainly would not attempt to go over to 'Moyeni' to-night. But if I should fail to turn up, after promising that I would do so, I know the little chap would be bitterly disappointed; so I suppose I shall have to go, difficult as the journey will certainly prove. Let me sec, what's the time now? H'm, yes, seven o'clock! I shall just have time for another pipe, and then I must start; for 'Moyeni' is a good six miles away. Heigho! I'm confoundedly sleepy, too; I really wish I hadn't to turn out."

So saying, the young man turned away from the little verandah running round his bungalow and re-entered the house. Then he seated himself in a particularly

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comfortable cane chair, drew out his pipe, charged it, and prepared to enjoy the smoke which he had promised himself before starting on his ride.

Marchmont was a young man of just twenty years of age when this story opens; and he had come out to Africa some three years previously with the intention of making a fortune by prospecting for gold in Zululand, where he had heard that the precious metal was to be found in considerable quantities. For the first few months he had met with the luck of the average prospector; that is to say, he had been anything but successful, finding only just sufficient profit in his work to keep him from absolute starvation; but pluck and perseverance had told in the long run and, after the lapse of a year or so, his fortunes had steadily improved until he had amassed a very nice sum of money, enabling him to purchase outright the land in which his mine was situated, and to provide that mine with a good deal of up-to-date machinery. Katana was the name of Hugh's little holding—round which a small village bearing the same name had gradually come into existence—and upon it he had built the bungalow in which we have just made his acquaintance, furnishing it throughout with furniture imported direct from England.

Although Marchmont's parents had both died before he had left England, the young man was not quite alone in the world, for he had brought out with him his only brother Jack, a boy of, at that time, seven years of age—entrusted to his care with his mother's dying breath—believing that the little lad would be happier with him, even in such a sparsely populated country as Zululand, than at a school in England, where he would have otherwise been compelled to leave him; since the youngster would at least have the comfort of his brother's company;

whereas in England he would have been completely alone among strangers.

Hugh soon discovered, however, that left to himself as he necessarily had been for a good deal of his time, Jack was manifesting a tendency to run wild ; and he began to wonder seriously whether it would not be better to send him away to school somewhere in Natal where he would at least have the advantage of discipline and training.

When the matter was broached, however, Jack had protested so vigorously against the idea of being parted from his brother that the latter had at last agreed upon a compromise, and had sent the boy across to the farm of his very good friends and neighbours, the O'Mores, whose eldest daughter, once herself a school mistress, had agreed to look after Jack, giving him that elementary instruction which might suffice until he was old enough to be sent away to school without feeling the parting from his brother too keenly.

It was this boy, a sturdy, curly-haired young Briton now about ten years of age, whom Marchmont was going to see on this particular evening ; for he had made it a rule, which he had never once broken, that he would call to see how Jack was getting on at least once a week ; and he knew that the warmth of the welcome which he would receive would amply compensate for the discomfort and danger of the journey he contemplated—discomfort, because he must ford several rivers in order to reach “ Moyeni,” and the night was pitch dark ; and danger—because in the intense darkness one false step on the part of his horse might send him hurtling to instant death over the edge of some *kloof*.

As Hugh sat ruminating over his pipe, after having ordered Soye, his Kafir “ boy ” to “ *Popela ihashi ga*

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mina " (get my horse ready), he decided that the world was now going very well with him, and that he had very little to worry about—save for one circumstance. That circumstance, however, was of distinctly sinister import, for it consisted in the fact that for several months past the Zulus had been manifesting symptoms of steadily-growing unrest, which now had become so pronounced that it seriously threatened to culminate in war—war with a powerful nation of savages who, whatever might be their good points in time of peace, were cruel, ferocious, and bloodthirsty to a degree when they took the field in battle array. And Katana was some thirty miles across the Zulu border ; while what was even more serious, so was " Moyeni," where Jack was now living. It was December of the year 1878, and from the preceding June, Hugh, together with other of his fellow-countrymen, had observed with ever increasing uneasiness, a tendency on the part of the Zulus not only to omit the customary salutes when passing a white man, but to treat the white man with a scarcely veiled contempt ; while there had recently been several murders of Europeans committed under circumstances which, although still enveloped in mystery, seemed to point very strongly to the suspicion of their having been perpetrated by natives. Cetewayo, the Zulu king, was well known to be chafing under the restrictions imposed upon him by the British ; and it was more than suspected that he was already mobilising his *impis* up in the north, ready for a descent upon the British territory.

The British forces in Zululand were, at that time, both small and widely scattered ; there was but a very insignificant body of troops in Natal ; and the Colonial Militia was very indifferently organised ; thus the

Europeans in Zululand felt that they were living on the edge of a volcano which might at any moment burst into activity and involve them all in one common destruction. And, to make matters still worse, it had recently been suspected that the little village of Katana held a traitor within its gates ; though just exactly who the man was it seemed impossible to discover. What had come to be definitely known, however, was that some white man was busily engaged in running guns over the border to the Zulus, who were thus being supplied with the newest arms and ammunition—arms which there was only too much reason to fear might soon be turned against those among whom the traitor was living. Bodies of mounted police had been scouring the country for several weeks past, in the hope of catching the gun-runner ; but thus far he had contrived to elude all his pursuers, although suspicion pointed very strongly to a certain individual who resided at Katana, and who somehow always seemed to be away from home upon the precise occasions when, as was subsequently discovered, a consignment of contraband had been run.

Thinking over these matters, and wondering how things were eventually going to turn out, Hugh let his pipe go out, and was on the point of dropping off into a quiet nap when he was aroused by the sepulchral voice of Soye, who appearing in the doorway, saluted, and informed the “ chief ” that his horse was ready.

“ All right, boy,” replied Hugh ; “ bring him round to the front and let me have my big boots ; it strikes me that there is going to be heavy rain to-night. I shall not be back until late, Soye, so you need not stay up for me ; but make some coffee, and put it on the kitchen stove before you go to your hut.”

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"*Lungili, Baas,*" answered the boy, and disappeared to carry out his orders, while Marchmont heaved himself out of his chair, stretched himself, yawned vigorously, and went into his bedroom to fetch his .450 calibre revolver, without which he never moved out of the house, now that the natives had become so restless and aggressive. In a few minutes he had completed his preparations, and putting on a broad-brimmed felt hat, walked to the door, where by the light of the lamp he perceived the faithful Soye walking his horse up and down in front of the verandah. One more glance at the threatening sky, in which neither moon nor stars were to be seen, and Hugh put his foot into the stirrup, swung himself into the saddle, and calling to Soye to "let go," touched his horse with the spur and cantered away into the hot, sweet-smelling and purple night.

The animal ought to have been able to traverse the road between Hugh's Bungalow and the homestead of "Moyeni" blindfolded, so often had he passed to and fro over it; and for perhaps a mile he cantered forward without slackening speed; but when he reached the open veldt even his unerring instinct seemed to be at fault; for he gradually pulled up until he was going at merely a slow walking pace and Hugh then knew from the uncertainty of his movements, that the animal had, to use a seaman's phrase, "lost his bearings."

"I was afraid of this," murmured Marchmont ruefully, swinging round in his saddle to see whether any of the lights of Katana were still in view from which he might get an idea of his position. Ah, yes; there was one, just a solitary little sparkle of light far away in the hollow behind them. Hugh looked at it intently; for, somehow, he had not expected to see a light precisely

in that quarter ; moreover, it seemed to him that the light was slowly moving. However, it was no doubt being carried by some inhabitant of the little village, who was on his way to visit a friend, although it was scarcely a night on which ordinary individuals would be tempted to go out visiting.

Carefully taking the bearings of the light, and assuming that Katana lay somewhere near it, Hugh turned his horse's head slightly and trotted away in a new direction, hoping that before long he would come across some landmark which would tell him exactly where he was. He jogged along for about another twenty minutes unable to see his hand before his face, and it then struck him rather forcibly that if he were on the right road he ought long ere this to have arrived at the ford of the Umhlatusana, that being the first of three small rivers which he would be obliged to cross in order to reach “Moyeni.”

After a few minutes further riding Hugh pulled up again, and rising in his stirrups, looked long and carefully round him in the hope of again catching a glimpse of some light which might give him a clue to his whereabouts ; but the search was fruitless, and the Stygian darkness shut him in on all sides like a thick curtain, making it impossible for the rider so much as to see his horse's ears.

“Confound it !” muttered Marchmont—and in the breathless stillness of the night his voice sounded weird and uncanny—“I certainly am hopelessly lost somewhere on the *veldt*, and I fear that there is not very much chance of my getting to “Moyeni ” to-night; moreover there is a storm brewing, unless I am greatly mistaken. A nice fix I shall be in if it breaks before I can find any shelter ! Whew ! what a flash !” he

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continued, as a vividly blue fork of lightning leaped across the sky, illuminating the surrounding country for one brief moment with a ghostly glare. "Perhaps, however, it may be a blessing in disguise," he resumed ; "for if the lightning only continues for a bit, I may be able to see where I am."

As if in response to his last remark the whole country was suddenly illuminated by the brilliant flickering of sheet lightning, unaccompanied, as yet, by any thunder ; and by the light thus afforded Hugh was able to obtain a pretty good view of his immediate surroundings. As he feared, he found that he was right out upon the high *veldt* instead of being down in the valley near the river ; but about a mile to his left hand he caught a momentary glimpse of a large clump of trees, while beyond them again the land seemed to dip down, as though into a valley of some sort. Hugh thought he recognised the clump of trees ; and if so, he should have had them on his right hand instead of on his left. So he decided to stay where he was until another flash came, and then endeavour to make certain that it was the proper landmark before moving. A few seconds later another series of flashes came, accompanied this time by a low, distant muttering of thunder, and he was able to ascertain that the clump of trees on his left was the only one within sight. This being so, he believed he could not go far wrong in making for it, so he turned his horse and cantered away toward it, having first marked down its direction in his mind's eye by means of the last flash.

He had not much difficulty, however, in finding his way, for now the flashes were almost continuous, and the country was lit up incessantly by the weird blue glare. It did not take Hugh very long to cover the

distance, for his horse was a powerful animal, and he gave him his head ; but they were still a few hundred yards away from the shelter of the wood when the rain began to descend as it only can in that country, not in a quiet sober downpour, but as though the floodgates of the sky had been suddenly opened and he was drenched to the skin long before he could reach cover.

As the trees were rather sparse at the outer edge of the wood, Hugh dismounted, and throwing the reins over Tommy's head, proceeded to lead him farther into it, to obtain better shelter from the rain, which was still coming down in cataracts. It was some few minutes before he reached a spot where the trees began to get dense enough for his purpose, but at last, aided by the shimmering lightning, Hugh came to a place where the foliage was thick enough to prevent the rain from dripping through. He was just about to tie Tommy up when he caught sight of an enormous mass of rock standing at a little distance, and since this promised to afford even better protection than the trees, he slipped the bridle over his arm once more and made his way toward the boulder. He had only gone a few yards, however, when Tommy began to exhibit unmistakable signs of nervousness—snorting, throwing his ears back, and manifesting the utmost reluctance to proceed, hanging back upon his bridle so strongly that at last Hugh decided to tie him up where he was, rather than lose time by trying to urge the animal forward. He therefore knotted the reins over the branch of a tree and then hurried forward until he found himself under the lee of the giant boulder.

Here he found that there was much less shelter than he had expected, for the wind had veered round

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slightly ; but by the light of the moon, which was now occasionally showing herself behind the swiftly moving clouds, he saw a little shelf of rock about ten feet up the boulder, and this shelf was almost entirely overhung with bushes. If he could but reach that shelf he would be sheltered from the rain, which still fell at brief intervals, and would possibly be able to light the pipe for which he had been longing for the last half-hour. It did not take him long to climb up, and he was soon comfortably ensconced in the perfectly dry hollow of the rock, completely screened from the rain by a huge clump of overhanging vegetation.

After settling down as comfortably as he could under the circumstances, Hugh dived his hand into his pocket for the necessary smoking gear and found, to his great satisfaction, that the tobacco pouch was fairly dry. He loaded his pipe and was just on the point of endeavouring to get a light, when he fancied he heard a sound ; and that sound caused him to slip his pipe back into his pocket hurriedly and to assure himself that his revolver was securely fixed in its holster.

What he heard was the subdued murmur of voices, and the sinister part of the matter was that *the voices were those of Zulus!* Now there could be but one reason why a body of natives should meet in a lonely place like this, at night, and that was for the purpose of plotting mischief. Hugh knew only too well how restless and discontented the Zulus had become, how disturbed the entire country was ; and this meeting in a secluded spot and at dead of night, seemed particularly ominous ; he therefore cautiously raised himself upon his hands and knees to crawl forward to the edge of the rock, so that he might see as well as hear what was going on.

The thunder was still rumbling and booming away in the distance, but Hugh nevertheless moved with the utmost caution, for the ears of savages are sharp, and he knew that, if he were found in his present situation he would be killed without compunction, and his body would be so effectually disposed of that nobody would ever know what had become of him.

By moving very carefully, however, he contrived to avoid making any sound ; and in about two minutes' time he reached the edge of the boulder, pulled aside a clump of brushwood, and found himself looking down into a kind of arena, the floor of which was perhaps twenty feet below the ledge where he was perched. The thunder had by this time died away to a low muttering in the distance, the clouds were fast blowing away, and the moon occasionally shone out from behind them, throwing a broad patch of light on the floor of the amphitheatre opposite to Hugh, while the near side of the arena, together with the ledge upon which he was lying concealed, were, luckily for the watcher, hidden in deep shadow.

For a few minutes there was no sign of the presence of any other human being than himself, although he could plainly hear the dull sound of voices ; but presently the tropical downpour ceased and he saw a gigantic native, clad only in a leopard-skin *mucha* round his loins, step into the open, to be immediately followed by a number of other natives, until there was a group of about a hundred present. Then the tall man, who appeared to be a person of some importance, seated himself upon a boulder, while the others ranged themselves in a semicircle, squatting on the ground with the chief in the centre. Not a word was now spoken, and the Zulus seemed as if they were waiting

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for something or somebody, the only sound that broke the intense stillness being the occasional clink of steel as the men moved the assegais which, Hugh noticed with a thrill of excitement, they had brought with them. There was mischief brewing here, he saw plainly, for not only had the Zulus brought their light hunting assegais, or *umkontos*, but they had also armed themselves with kerries and the formidable, broad-bladed, stabbing *ixwa* ; in short, every man was accoutred as if for war ; and Hugh was torn between the necessity to see what it was they intended to do next—and ascertain, if possible, their plans—and his desire to get away undiscovered from the place as soon as he could, in order to warn the Europeans of the imminent peril in which it was now apparent everyone was standing. His heart beat wildly, and nearly stood still as he thought of Jack's possible fate, should he fail to reach him safely before the country was ablaze and the Zulus swept through the land carrying death and destruction everywhere.

But he had very little time for thought, for the next moment he heard a sound like that of a strong wind rushing through dried palm leaves as the Zulus raised their sheaves of assegais and rattled them together. A dull murmur arose from the assembled throng, and Hugh saw an extraordinary figure make its appearance in the little patch of moonlight. It was that of a man, undoubtedly, though it bore a much more striking resemblance to a monkey, for it was bent nearly double, stood only about four feet in height, and looked like a skeleton covered with a dried, brown skin. Round the waist were suspended strings of beads, knuckle-bones of hyenas and jackals, tails of oxen and all manner of gruesome-looking objects ; and Marchmont at once

realized that the repulsive-looking object was a Zulu *isanuisi* or witch-doctor. In his right hand the *isanuisi* held a broad-bladed assegai, red from point to haft with blood ; and as he crept forward he began to chant monotonously in a thin, piping, metallic voice. Hugh understood the Zulu language perfectly, but he could not comprehend what the witch-doctor was saying, although the assembled savages seemed to understand for, now and again, there rose a loud, hoarse murmur of assent from their ranks, interspersed with ejaculations of “ *whau ! ewe, isanuisi !* ” (it is so, wizard) and “ *izinja abelungu !* ” (dogs of white men)

This speech or chant rambled on for about twenty minutes or more, and Hugh perceived, from the excited looks and angry ejaculations of the Zulus, that it was producing a marked effect upon them ; he was also able to tell from the occasional interjection of one or another of the party that the subject of the wizard's harangue was the extermination of the whites ; and he wished that the *isanuisi* would cease, so that the others might discuss matters, when he would, he hoped, be able to understand what was said.

He had not long to wait, for the next moment the witch-doctor stopped, and a roar like that of a number of wild beasts let loose arose from his audience, accompanied by the clash of assegai blades and the rattle of their hafts upon raw-hide shields. Then the tall savage rose from the boulder upon which he had been seated and stalked into the middle of the arena, the *isanuisi* squatting down a few feet behind him. In a moment the uproar was stilled and a deep silence fell upon the assembly, while Hugh strained his ears to catch what the man should say, almost losing his balance and falling into the arena in his eagerness to get as close as possible.

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There was a moment's pause, and then the warrior exclaimed :

"Ye have heard, O *Amazulu*," (people of the Heavens—"Zulu" means literally "the Heavens") "what 'Ngcala has said ; and I see that ye agree with him. How much longer are we to submit tamely to the tyranny of the *abelungu* (white man) ? Are we not even as slaves ? You 'Mhala, and you, Gnesu, are ye not servants—slaves to the whites, and do not their women smite ye if ye do not give them instant obedience ?" There was a hoarse growl of anger from the two men mentioned, as the Zulu made this inquiry, and Hugh saw that they were the two stable boys belonging to certain people living at Katana ; it was evident therefore that the Europeans had traitors in their very midst.

"Ay," proceeded the warrior in his deep rolling bass ; "ye are nothing but slaves ; and it is not seemly that we, warriors of the king, should be held in thrall by the *abelungu*, much less by their women. Even the Great Great One, he who lives at Ulundi, is no longer a king save in name, for the *amajoni* (soldiers) have taken all his power from him. He is forbidden to put to death, save with their consent ; he is forbidden to make war, except with their permission ; he may not keep slaves ; and more humiliating still, he is actually to be fined five hundred head of cattle for refusing to give up two warriors at the bidding of the white chief, who affirms that they have done murder. Murder, forsooth ! Since when has the Zulu king been responsible to the white man for his actions ? My brothers, this has been borne long enough, and the time is ripe for the great rising whereby all the dogs shall be driven into the sea. The Great Great One has already collected his *impis* in the north, and he has sent me to say that the

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time is close at hand and that ye are to be ready when he calls. In a short time ye shall hear the rumble of the Elephant's tread, and when he trumpets then ye shall come. But one moon more after this one has died, and the Great Great One shall be in your midst ; but until he comes ye are to remain at your work, as though nothing were toward, so that the *abelungu* may be lulled into security, and none of them escape the doom which is already so near them. The word by which ye shall know that the time is at hand will be 'In the dark of the moon' ; for by the time that the Great Great One comes among you there will be no moon. Now bring forth the goats, 'Ngcala, and I will show ye, by means of a sign, that the warriors of the Zulus shall triumph over the whites."

He ceased, amid a roar of applause, and took his seat once more upon the boulder, while 'Ngcala the *isanuisi* scrambled to his feet and hobbled away, like some unclean thing, into the shadows ; reappearing a few minutes afterward leading a couple of goats, one of which was black while the other was snow-white. Hugh at once comprehended the significance of the two colours. The black goat was evidently intended to typify the Zulu race, while the white animal stood for the Europeans. Two stout stakes were now driven firmly into the ground, and the goats were tightly secured to them so that they were scarcely able to move. 'Ngcala then took a broad-bladed *ixwa* and mutilated each of the animals in exactly the same way—starting with the white one, however—and taking no heed of their struggles or of their shrill screams of agony, which made Hugh feel sick with horror.

The witch-doctor then left them, and all the Zulus formed a circle round the struggling, tortured animals,

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keeping up a dull monotonous chant meanwhile which, after a time, acted upon Marchmont like a soporific, so that he found himself almost on the point of falling asleep ; when the chant suddenly ceased and he heard a great shout of "The Omen ! Behold, The Omen !"

Pulling himself together with an effort, Hugh forced himself to look at the scene before him, and although the Zulus were clustering pretty closely round the goats, he was able to see that *the white one now lay dead in a pool of blood, while the other, the black goat, though only struggling feebly, was still alive.* The full significance of the omen then came home to him forcibly, for he saw that the savages were quite convinced by it that the blacks would conquer and that the white men would die. It was evident too that the ceremony was over and that the Zulus were about to disperse ; so, if he desired to escape, it behoved him to get away quickly, or they would be certain to find his horse as they separated to go to their homes ; and Hugh knew full well that if they once found Tommy the search would never be abandoned until they had also found him.

Profiting, therefore, by the confusion and noise, he slipped cautiously down from his perch and hastened away through the trees where Tommy was tied up, quickly loosed the reins, and led him away until he considered that he would be well beyond earshot of the Zulus ; then he mounted and galloped off as hard as his horse could lay hoofs to the ground. When he had covered about a couple of miles Hugh looked at his watch, and finding that it was long after midnight, determined to postpone his visit to "Moyeni" until the morning, when, he decided, he would make a great effort to induce James O'More to take his family and

Jack out of the country before it should be too late. He then drew rein and cantered easily homeward, experiencing no difficulty in finding the way, now that the moon was shining ; and arrived there, he put his horse into the stable without waking the “boy,” went indoors, and hastily undressing, threw himself upon the bed and passed in a few minutes into slumber, which was broken by horrible dreams, in which he thought he could hear the voice of Jack calling for help, which he was quite unable to render.

CHAPTER II

SERGEANT FYFE'S NEWS

WHEN Hugh awoke next morning his first feeling was that the events of the preceding night simply formed a part of an unusually vivid and unpleasant dream ; but reflection soon convinced him that what he had seen was a terrible reality and that it behoved him to make use of the knowledge which he had acquired without a moment's unnecessary delay.

The first thing to be done, he decided, was to ride across to "Moyeni" and acquaint James O'More with the actual state of affairs and urge him to take his family out of the country while the way still remained open ; the second was to apprise the authorities at Eshowe—which was the nearest fortified post—that the outbreak of rebellion was not only a settled thing but was also very much more imminent than they—or indeed anybody else for that matter—suspected. He therefore went to the kitchen door, called up Soye, to whom he gave orders to saddle Tommy at once, and then returned to his bedroom to tub and dress. By the time that this operation was completed his horse was standing saddled before the door and his breakfast lay smoking on the table ; Hugh therefore fell to with a good appetite, and glancing at his watch as he at length rose from the table, was astonished to find that the hands

pointed to ten o'clock, showing that he had overslept himself by at least two hours. He promised himself, however, that he would make up part of the lost time by speedy travel on the road between Katana and "Moyeni."

He then gave his servant his instructions for the day and walked out on to the verandah, where he pulled on his leather gloves and prepared to mount; but just as he was putting his foot into the stirrup his attention was arrested by a cloud of dust which was rapidly approaching the bungalow from the direction of either Eshowe or Melmoth, and he soon saw that it was created by a posse of half a dozen Border Riflemen in charge of a sergeant, the pace at which the troop travelled convincing Hugh that they were in a desperate hurry. As it was quite evident that they were making for his house, Marchmont called Soye and directed him to take his horse away for the moment; and a couple of minutes later the soldiers swung their horses into the path leading into the bungalow and pulled up before the verandah, the animals lathered with sweat and the men reeking with perspiration and dust. The sergeant, with a curt word of command to his men, swung himself out of the saddle and walked up the steps to the verandah with the stiff stride of a man who has been on horseback for many hours; then he saluted as he remarked to Hugh:

"Good morning Mr. Marchmont; would you be good enough to spare me a few minutes of your time? I have some rather important news to communicate to you. But can you tell me first, whether you have seen a mounted man pass anywhere near here within the last half hour, riding as though for his life?"

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"No sergeant, I have not," replied Hugh ; " for to tell you the truth, I have only very recently turned out, having overslept myself this morning. But I will call Soye ; perhaps he may have seen the man you are enquiring for."

Soye was accordingly called and questioned ; but it appeared that although he had been up and working ever since daybreak he had seen nobody answering to the sergeant's description, which was that of a man dressed in brown corduroy riding-breeches, with brown top-boots, a brown tweed coat, and a broad brimmed felt hat ; riding a big black horse of about sixteen and a half hands high. The sergeant had been unable to see the man's face, but he believed that the fellow would be of medium size ; and, from the thick-set look of the body he thought that the unknown would be about forty years of age.

"Oh, well," said Sergeant Fyfe with a sigh of disappointment, when he had been told that his quarry had not been seen, " we must push our enquiries in other directions, I suppose. We lost sight of the man several miles back, unfortunately, and of course he might easily have left the road and struck into the bush before he got so far as this. Still, if you will let me come in for a few minutes, sir, I will explain the business upon which I am engaged, and perhaps then you may be able to say whether you can help me." Then, having received a cordial invitation to step inside, he turned to his men and ordered them to off-saddle, in order to ease the horses, adding that he would probably be ready to start again in half an hour. He then entered the house, and having seated himself in a comfortable lounge chair, began :

"I won't take up more of your time than I can

possibly help, Mr. Marchmont; but I daresay you have already guessed that we are after a criminal. Such is indeed the case, and I may tell you that we want the man very badly, although I am sorry to say that at present we have no idea as to who he really is, though we have a very strong suspicion. As of course you know, we seem to be on the very verge of a war with the Zulus which I fear nothing can possibly prevent. Yet for some time past we have been receiving information that the natives are being supplied with the newest Martini-Henry rifles, and large quantities of ammunition; in fact it is believed that something like twenty thousand rifles and a million rounds of ball cartridge have been placed in the hands of the Zulus within the last four months. Of course, immediately that we heard the news, patrols of police were placed at every known ford of the Tugela; but until the day before yesterday no trace of the gun-runner was to be found, although arms and ammunition were still being smuggled over the border. However, we gradually closed up the cordon of police, and have at length come to the conclusion that the guns are almost certainly being taken across a hitherto unknown ford of the river, within a dozen miles of this place. As you know, the river makes a big bend in a north-westerly direction about twelve miles east of Katana; and we are under the impression that the gun-runner, whoever he may be, is getting the stuff into Zulu territory by way of a ford at the northern extremity of that bend. Last night, therefore, a strong force of police under my command was posted at the spot and we went into ambush. Nothing happened until some time after midnight, when we heard the sound of a waggon approaching and I instructed my men to be ready. In order not to

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surprise the man until he was safely in the net I allowed the waggon to cross the ford and get to our side, and I then perceived a horseman riding along close behind it. He was wearing the clothes and riding the horse which I have already described to you—that much I could see by the light of the moon, although his face was shaded by his broad-brimmed hat—and there was no doubt in my mind that he was the man for whom we had so long been looking. I therefore called to him to throw up his hands and led my men out of ambush in order to surround him.

“An unpleasant surprise was, however, in store for us ; for as we rode out into the open, a fearful yell sounded in our ears, and my little troop was charged by some two hundred armed Zulus who had evidently been waiting to take over the arms as soon as they arrived on the Zulu side of the river. We were between the gun-runner and his friends, so that he could not reach them, but he turned his horse and dashed back again through the ford to the Natal side. We were unable to pursue at once, because we had our hands full with the natives who were attacking us savagely. I did all in my power to capture that waggon but it was of no use, the Zulus must have outnumbered us by at least twenty to one, and after several minutes of very hot fighting I was compelled to sound the retreat, leaving the waggon in the hands of the enemy. It was quite as much as we could do to get away with our lives ; and indeed if the natives had chosen to pursue us they could have wiped us all out while we were crossing the river. As it was we lost five poor fellows. Of course, when we ultimately formed up on the Natal side our quarry was nowhere to be seen, and although we followed his tracks for several miles we

eventually lost them over some hard ground. However, I did not give up the search, feeling sure that he must have gone into hiding somewhere near at hand ; and I was not mistaken, for this morning he dashed out of a clump of trees on the far side as I and my troop entered the wood. We were after him like a shot, but we again lost him a few miles from here and I called in to ask you if you had seen anyone ride past.

“ That, Mr. Marchmont, is my story ; but I have a plan to suggest to you whereby I think the man may be caught if you will agree to help us, and it is this : The fellow having got clear away will take good care not to commit himself again while we are in the neighbourhood ; but at the same time it is absolutely necessary that he should be caught, so that this smuggling of arms may be put a stop to. Therefore I propose at once to withdraw my men to Melmoth—from which place there is a telegraph-line to Katana, you will remember—allowing it to be understood that we have given up the search. Now you, sir, are an officer of the Zululand Mounted Rifles, and as an official, may help us if you will. The gun-runner, believing us to have returned to our headquarters, will most certainly attempt to run another consignment of arms at an early date ; my suggestion therefore is that you personally should assume the task of watching the ford and endeavour to discover who the scoundrel really is who is doing this dirty work. If you should recognise him please telegraph to me at Melmoth and we will come over to Katana ; for when once the fellow is known, the work of capturing him will be a great deal easier. Now, what do you say, sir ? ”

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Hugh remained sunk in thought for several minutes, during which Sergeant Fyfe anxiously watched his face. The young man was quite as anxious as was Fyfe that the traitor should be caught, but he certainly did not like the idea of acting as a kind of spy. However, he decided, the man must be laid by the heels somehow or other, for every gun that reached Zulu hands would mean the death of at least one Englishman; and one of those guns might very easily be responsible for the murder of James O'More or even Jack——

"All right, sergeant," he said, suddenly raising his head and holding out his hand to the soldier; "I'll do what you ask, and I only hope I may be successful in finding and recognising the scoundrel. But now let me give you in return an item of information which I should like you to communicate to Colonel Pearson at Eshowe with all speed, for it is of the utmost importance that he should learn it at once; before you turned up, indeed, I was myself intending to ride over to the fort with the news; but you can save me the journey by taking it for me."

Hugh then proceeded to give the sergeant an account of the incident of the previous evening and was not surprised to see Fyfe's face lengthen and his brow pucker at the recital; for the soldier was an old colonial who had spent the greater part of his life in Zululand and Natal, and he was fully aware of the deep significance of the circumstance which was being related to him. When Hugh had finished Fyfe exclaimed:

"You are right, sir, in saying that Colonel Pearson ought to know of this at once; for I am sure he does not consider the danger so imminent as it really seems

to be ; but when he hears what I shall have to tell him I think he will alter his mind. And now you must excuse me, Mr. Marchmont, for every minute of my time is precious ; for although the Zulus seem to have arranged to rise ' at the dark of the moon,' there is no knowing whether they may not alter their minds ; and as yet the country is quite unprepared to resist them. Many thanks, sir, for your consent to fall in with my plans ; I feel sure you will be successful, and we shall score the first trick against the Zulus if we can only lay hands on that precious gun-runner of theirs. I expect, though, you and your troop will be called out pretty soon, sir ; for the authorities will require every available man when once war has commenced."

"They will," responded Hugh emphatically. " By the way, though, sergeant," he continued, " you said that you had a pretty shrewd suspicion as to the identity of the smuggler. It would of course be a great help to me if you would tell me who it is that you suspect, for I could then keep an eye on him, or have him shadowed by Soye, who I know is perfectly loyal."

"Why yes, to be sure," returned Fyfe ; "What a fool I was to have forgotten that : I suppose it was your account of last night's happenings that put it out of my mind. The man whom I so strongly suspect is one of those Norwegian colonists who have planted themselves all over the country. His name"—here Fyfe looked toward the door open, dropping his voice as he did so—"is Jacob Bjorseth ; and he is ostensibly occupied in keeping a little store down by the fork of the Umhlatuzi—you know the place, don't you ? He is the man whom the Kafirs call '*Ngcugundevu*,' because he is clean

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shaven. I am almost certain that he is the fellow we want, but of course you must be careful, sir, and not act until your suspicions are confirmed; it would never do to make a mistake in a matter of this kind."

"Quite so, Fyfe, quite so," agreed Hugh; "you may rely absolutely upon my discretion. And now if you must go I will say *au revoir*. Don't on any account forget to tell Colonel Pearson about the events of last night; and you had better keep a man constantly on duty at the post office at Melmoth so that you may lose no time in coming along if I should be lucky enough to be able to send you a telegram."

"Right you are, Mr. Marchmont," said the soldier, "I won't forget. Good morning, and many thanks for your kind offer of assistance."

Fyfe then shook hands and strode to the door, from whence he shouted to the riflemen to "saddle up," and in five minutes the little band were clattering away down the road in a cloud of dust on their way to Eshowe with Hugh's message. When they had gone Marchmont went indoors to think matters over, for it seemed to him that they were growing more and more serious every day. Nearly half the Zulu *impis*, he reflected, must now be armed with rifles if, as the sergeant averred, twenty thousand weapons had already passed the border, and that number, in the hands of brave and ruthless savages, was more than enough to wipe out all the white inhabitants of Zululand! Who, he wondered, could the smuggler be? He thought, somehow, that Fyfe had been mistaken in supposing that Bjorseth was the man, for personally he did not believe that the Norwegian possessed the courage and hardihood to carry through an enterprise of that sort. Anyhow, he decided, he must

start off at once for "Moyeni" and warn O'More; for it was evident that the storm of war might burst at any moment and overwhelm those who were in its track.

He accordingly mounted, and rode away down the side of the hill toward the ford of the Umhlatuzana which he ought to have crossed the night before, when he lost his way. As he trotted sharply along he thought he heard a shout somewhere behind him, and wheeled sharply in his saddle, looking back. He could not see anyone, but the action awoke a train of thought in the young man's mind, for it was somewhere near this same place that he had turned in his saddle the previous evening and had caught sight of a certain light which at the time he had thought might be in one of the houses or the street—there was but one—of Katana. But now by daylight he could see that there was no building of any description on the part of the *veldt* where he had seen the light. Then somebody must have been carrying a lantern over in that direction, and Hugh knew that nobody was in the least likely to have been out on such an evening as was the previous one unless it had been business or for some unlawful purpose. But business could mean simply a journey from one house to another, and there were no houses in that quarter. The supposition therefore was that—well, that mischief of some sort must have been afoot.

For nearly the whole of the distance to "Moyeni" Hugh allowed the horse to carry him at its own pace, for he was thinking too deeply to notice the speed at which he was travelling. He had just come in sight of James O'More's house when he apparently arrived at a certain conclusion in his own mind, for he raised his head and seeing the house a quarter of a mile in front of him,

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gave a joyful "whoop," which was heard by a certain small boy in the interior of the building, dug the spurs into Tommy's sides, and clattered swiftly over the dusty path toward the gate where Jack now stood awaiting his brother's arrival.

CHAPTER III

EXCITING NEWS

To Hugh's surprise Jack was joined by a Kafir girl, who came forward to lead his horse to the stable.

Jack seemed to be in a state of great excitement, and hardly allowing his big brother time to dismount, rushed up shouting : "I say, Hugh, all our boys have gone off and Uncle O'More says he wants to see you as soon as you arrive. Why didn't you come last night ? Have you brought that book you promised me ? And——"

"Steady, old chap," interrupted Marchmont ; "one question at a time, you know. What is this about the 'boys,' and where is Mr. O'More ?"

"One question at a time," retorted Jack, saucily, "uncle is in the study ; I'll go and tell him you are here." And he darted off, followed more slowly by his big brother.

Although the news that the natives had cleared off hardly came as a surprise to Hugh it was nevertheless very disconcerting ; for in view of what he had seen on the previous evening, he felt quite convinced that the word had already arrived for certain of the men to leave their work and join the regiments mobilising at Ulundi. In that case it seemed probable that the moment for the rising had been altered and that the Zulus did not intend to wait for the dark of the next

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moon, in which case the destroying hordes might appear and overwhelm them all at any moment. Hugh's heart turned sick when he thought of how terribly imminent the danger actually was, and he determined to spare no effort to induce O'More to leave the country without a day's delay. He remained sunk in such deep thought that he scarcely noticed that he had reached the study door, and was only recalled to earth by hearing Jack exclaim: "Here he is, uncle; but I think he can't have been to bed last night, he looks so sleepy, and hasn't answered anything I asked him."

James O'More, a delightfully cheery-looking man of about forty years of age, raised his somewhat bulky form out of the depths of an armchair and came forward to greet his visitor.

"Ah, Marchmont," he exclaimed, holding out his hand, "I am glad you have turned up, for you are the very man I wanted to see; and I was wondering what had happened to you last night. Jack was quite inconsolable because you failed to turn up. But sit down, my boy, take that easy-chair, and make yourself comfortable, then let us hear what you have to say for yourself."

Thus adjured, Hugh seated himself and at once proceeded to give a detailed account of what had happened on the previous evening when he had lost his way on the road to "Moyeni," finishing up his story by telling O'More that he was sure the outbreak of war was much nearer than anyone supposed. "Why," he exclaimed, "you have proof of that in the fact that all your 'boys' have cleared off the premises. You may be sure that the Zulu army is mobilising, and that is the reason why all these fellows are going away northward. As soon as all have joined their *impis*

the army will sweep through Zululand, leaving not one white person alive—unless we take the warnings we can see everywhere around us, and prepare in earnest for war. Now, Mr. O'More," he went on, "I think, if you will allow me to say so, that the wisest course for you to pursue will be to leave this place, which is right in the path which the Zulu army will probably take, and get over the border into Natal with all possible speed. There you will be reasonably safe, at least for a time and until we can see how things are likely to turn out; and if you will still be so good as to be troubled with the youngster, perhaps you will take Jack with you? I will look after this place for you to the best of my ability until the Zululand Rifles are called out—when I shall of course have to join my detachment. But when that happens we shall probably all be fighting for our lives; and nobody will have any time to think about or look after property."

The other lay back in his chair for some minutes after Hugh had finished speaking, blowing clouds of tobacco-smoke toward the ceiling and evidently thinking deeply; then at last he straightened himself up, shook his head once or twice, and replied: "I am afraid, Hugh, that what you suggest is quite out of the question, as far as regards myself at any rate. Things are in such a condition on the farm now, especially since the natives have gone, that I could not possibly leave it, even in your charge. But I quite see your point as to the advisability of removing my daughter to Natal, and that at once; and of course she will be delighted to have Jack with her—the little fellow has become quite one of the family. If therefore you will be so good as to look after 'Moyeni' for a few days, I will take them over the border and leave them with some friends at

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Greytown ; but I shall be obliged to return here myself as soon as I have done that ; for I really cannot leave the farm at present. Of course, if war should really break out—as there seems but too much reason to fear it will—I shall be obliged to go, I suppose ; but I must stay on here until the very last moment, in the hope that the outbreak of hostilities may be long enough delayed to enable me to complete all that I have to do here.”

The two men then proceeded to discuss the idea more fully, O'More saying that perhaps it might be possible for them to start on the following morning, provided that his daughter returned early in the day from a visit she was paying to a friend at the next farm. “She should have returned last night,” said the farmer, “but I expect she did not come on account of the weather ; she might be here at any moment now.”

He had hardly finished speaking when the sound of hoofs was heard in the distance and he started to his feet, exclaiming :

“Hark ! I fancy I hear someone coming ; it is a man on horseback ; and by the clatter he is making he seems to be in a dickens of a hurry. I hope,” he went on, his face paling somewhat, “he is not bringing bad news. Let us go out and see what he wants.”

The same thought that had entered O'More's mind had also crossed Hugh's ; and the two men exchanged questioning glances as they rose from their chairs, while Marchmont slipped his hand into his pocket to make sure that his Webley revolver was in its accustomed place. In a moment they had stepped out on the verandah and stood looking down the road at a column of dust that was rapidly approaching, out of which a horseman in the uniform of the Border Mounted

Rifles presently emerged. A few seconds later the man dashed up to the verandah and slipping out of the saddle, flung his reins over the gatepost, adjusted his bandolier, and walked up the steps, disclosing to Hugh's astonished gaze the well-known features of Sergeant Fyfe.

"Hillo ! sergeant," exclaimed the young man, "you seem to be busy this morning. What brings you here ? Not bad news, I hope ?" he added anxiously, glancing down the road to see whether the rifleman was being pursued by a crowd of armed natives.

"Ah, there you are, sir," replied the sergeant, addressing Marchmont ; "I thought I should perhaps find you here, for I've already been over to your place and Soye told me that you were away from home. I won't say it is bad news exactly, but it certainly cannot be called good. After I left you this morning I struck out as you know for Eshowe ; but when I came up to the little telegraph station at the Umhlatusi fork, it occurred to me that it would be a good plan to send forward by wire to Colonel Pearson the information you gave me, instead of riding all the way to Eshowe, as by doing so I should save several hours. And it was a good thing I thought of doing so as it happened, for the colonel was himself anxious to get into touch with me ; and he telegraphed me certain instructions which I am now carrying out.

"They have heard at Eshowe that the Zulus from the north are already on the march to Ulundi, where they will join the rest of the *impis* under Cetewayo himself ; and as soon as the two forces have met, the king intends to lead them south without further delay, in order to attempt the invasion of Natal before the Imperial troops can oppose him. The colonel reckons

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that in a week's time at the latest they will be outside Eshowe; and he has therefore sent messengers all over the country to instruct the various bodies of riflemen at once to mobilise and march to Eshowe. You sir, are a captain of Zululand Rifles, and my message to you is that you collect your troop headquartered at Katana and march the day after to-morrow for the fort at Eshowe. And now, having delivered my message to you, I must be off; for I have several other places to call at, and I have already lost a couple of hours by being obliged to come here after you. You have a little more than a day in which to collect your men and make all your preparations, so you have not very much time to waste. The detachment at Jakob's Post on the Buffalo, where I am next going, will have to start at once or they will be too late; they ought to pass here on Friday morning, the day on which you are due to leave, so you may perhaps fall in with them and go on together."

"Yes, quite possibly," agreed Hugh. "So it has come, and quite suddenly, too," he continued. "If the Zulus are already on the move, the civilians will hardly have time to get away! What are they to do?"

"That I can't say, Mr. Marchmont," answered Fyfe. "I have received no instructions about them; and it may be that in the confusion they have been forgotten. But I shall of course advise everybody to trek to Natal with all possible speed. Good morning, sir; good morning, Mr. O'More," concluded the sergeant as he ran down the steps. He swung into the saddle, dug in his spurs, and with a wave of his hat dashed away again to carry the alarm to every village which he could reach in the short time at his disposal. The two men on the

verandah watched him out of sight ; and when he was hidden by a turn in the road they went indoors to the study, where they sat down and looked at each other in silence for a few minutes.

"Well," exclaimed O'More after a pause, " this puts an entirely new complexion on matters ; we shall all be obliged to leave now, my boy ; it is no longer a matter of choice, and we shall have to hurry. I shall load up what I can take on a single waggon, and be off by to-morrow evening, at the latest ; so I wonder whether you would mind lending me some of your labourers to help me with the job ? For as you know, mine have all left."

"Of course I will," returned Hugh, heartily ; " and you are heartily welcome. I will send a gang over directly I get back to Katana—that is if my fellows have not decamped in the meantime. And that reminds me that under the circumstances I ought to be getting back at once, for goodness knows what may be happening now. So good-bye for the present. I will not forget about those ' boys,' and will come over the first thing in the morning to lend a hand myself in any way I can. You will tell Jack all that is necessary, will you not ? And please remember me to Miss O'More. I'll get my horse myself ; and I must hustle him along too, or it will be too late to do what I shall have to do when I get back to the bungalow."

With this hurried farewell, Hugh rode away to Katana to beat up as many of his mine labourers as he could find in order to send them over to " Moyeni " to help the O'Mores with their work of packing up. By dint of hard riding he arrived at the bungalow within the hour, and, calling Soye, rode over with the native to the mine location compound, where the labourers' huts

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were situated. As he rode in through the gate, however, he was struck by the deserted air of the place, and it did not need Soye's guttural exclamation of astonishment to assure him that his workmen also had decamped and gone off to join the Zulu army. A quick examination of the huts showed that such was indeed the case, and this fact brought home to Hugh still more clearly the danger in which everyone was standing.

After a few minutes' consideration as to what course it would be best to pursue, Marchmont rode to the Court House, where he found the resident magistrate hastily collecting his books and papers preparatory to joining in the exodus to Natal. To him Hugh represented the dilemma in which O'More was placed by the desertion of his natives, and after a great deal of argument and persuasion, he at length prevailed upon the official to lend him a couple of native policemen. These he immediately sent over to "Moyeni" in charge of Soye, after which, having done all that lay in his power in that direction, he returned to his bungalow to pack a few necessities for his own hurried march on Friday.

Hugh's nearest way back to his bungalow lay through the village, and as he passed he saw everywhere the results of Sergeant Fyfe's alarm and call to arms. People were loading up furniture and goods of all descriptions into bullock waggons; children whose parents were too busy to attend to them were standing about crying; men and women were hurrying through the street looking for friends who had been lost in the confusion; and on everybody's face was stamped the strained look of terror which showed that they expected at any moment to hear the war-cry of a Zulu *impi*

ringing in their ears. On the way, Hugh passed the little iron-roofed shanty which served as headquarters for the Zululand Mounted Rifles at Katana, and he quickly dismounted and went inside, where he found about a score of his men already in uniform and awaiting orders. He left word with these to ride round and notify the rest of the contingent to muster outside the Court House at noon on the morrow and then continued his way home. By this time he was very tired and extremely glad of the cold collation that the faithful Soye had spread ready for him.

Hugh felt himself a new man as, having heartily partaken of luncheon, he lighted up a pipe and carried his iced coffee out on to the verandah, where he sat down in one of his lounge chairs to think over the events of the day.

He felt restless, however, and changing his mind about waiting until the morning, ordered out his horse and rode back again to O'More's house, in order to himself lend a hand, giving no thought to the fact that he had as yet made no real preparations for his own departure. Still, he told himself, his house was only a bachelor's bungalow and it would be no very serious matter if he had to leave his few belongings behind. When he arrived at "Moyeni" he found Soye and the native policemen hard at work loading up furniture into a couple of bullock waggons which stood in front of the house; and he stripped off his coat and set to work with the rest, with the result that by midnight they had very nearly completed the dismantling of the house. At any rate, everybody was too tired to do any more work that night, so Soye and the policeman retreated to the Kafir huts in the back premises to sleep, while Hugh mounted his horse to ride back to Katana.

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Both O'More and his daughter, who had by this time returned, pressed Hugh to remain for the night at the farm, but he excused himself on the ground of the work still awaiting him at his own place; nevertheless, he promised to return early the following day to wish them good-bye and God speed!

As Hugh was on the point of leaving, O'More remarked to him: "I suppose you haven't seen anything of Salvaterra in Katana, have you Marchmont? There is something about that fellow I can't quite understand, though exactly what it is it would puzzle me to say; he is always quite civil and friendly when he comes here, and in all business matters I have found him perfectly honest; still, I do not quite fancy the man, although no longer than last night I lent him the best horse in my stable because he seemed in such a tearing hurry when he galloped up to beg the loan of it from me. His own horse—a big black brute—in a perfect lather of sweat and smothered in dust, seemed to be almost exhausted, while Salvaterra himself looked as though he had not slept for several nights. I never saw a man look more haggard and worn out. He explained that he had most urgent business to attend to at Jakob's Post on the Buffalo; that he had just come across from Natal; that his horse was quite worn out with rapid travel; and he ended by asking me if I could lend him a fresh animal—which, of course, I did; and he rode off with hardly so much as a 'thank you,' leaving his own horse in our stables, where it is now.

"But to tell you the truth, Hugh, I do not altogether believe that the man's story was a true one. His manner and appearance somehow suggested to me the idea that the business upon which he had been engaged

was not exactly all that it should have been, and I am beginning to think that I was a bit foolish to let him have that horse ; I do not feel at all certain that I shall ever see it again. Also, the whole time that he was standing talking here waiting for another animal to be brought, he was continually looking hastily over his shoulder, almost as though he feared pursuit ; and once, when he heard a hunting party ride past, he looked as though he would have fainted. However, I am detaining you with my yarning and—but what is the matter ? You look as though what I have been saying has set you thinking.”

“Well, yes, to tell you the truth, you have reminded me of something,” replied Hugh. “What time was it then that fellow Salvaterra arrived here this morning ? Was it about nine o’clock ? ”

“Why yes, it was,” answered O’More in astonishment. “But how did you come to guess the time so exactly ? ”

“That I will tell you some other time—to-morrow, perhaps,” said Hugh. “But I believe you have hit the mark in thinking Salvaterra to be a scoundrel ; only, if my suspicion should turn out to be correct, he is a bigger scoundrel than either you or anybody else has any idea of. I will not say anything more at present, for it is scarcely fair to a man to blacken his character before one is absolutely certain ; but your story certainly throws a strong light on something which has been puzzling both Sergeant Fyfe and myself.”

“Why, what on earth has Sergeant Fyfe to do with it ? ” enquired the farmer, astonished.

“Well,” replied Marchmont, “the fact is that he was in chase of a man this morning and the man suddenly vanished. Fyfe thought he might have come my

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way, and asked me if I had seen him ; but I had not. It seems now as though this might have been the direction he took. I mustn't say any more, however, at present, it would be a nasty trick to speak ill of a man without being certain of the truth of the affair, so do not attach too much importance to what I have said. And now I must really be off. Good night, old chap, good night."

And Hugh rode out into the darkness, his mind a little confused by the varied and exciting events of the day, but determined in spite of the shortness of the time to do his best to ascertain whether Salvaterra and the gun-runner wanted by Fyfe and himself were one and the same man.

CHAPTER IV

THE GUN-RUNNER

As Marchmont trotted along the moonlit *veldt* on his way to Katana, he muttered to himself: "I wish O'More had thought of giving me that bit of information about Salvaterra before Fyfe turned up at 'Moyeni' this afternoon; I believe the sergeant would have given a good deal to have been told what I have just learned. Still, I do not quite see what he could have done; he was in much too great a hurry to have gone out of his way at this critical moment to look for a scoundrel of a gun-runner. If Salvaterra is the man—and it looks very much like it—he will be responsible for a good many deaths before the war is over. I wish I could get my hands on the fellow; but I expect he will be far enough away by this time. That yarn about his having business at Jakob's Post on the Buffalo was no doubt spun to put possible pursuers on the wrong scent; I believe he would be far more likely to strike out at once for Ulundi, and place himself under the protection of Cetewayo, who may very possibly take care of him in the hope of getting a few further consignments of rifles. One thing is certain, Salvaterra—if indeed he is the man—will never dare to show himself in Natal, or even so far south as this place, for that matter, in the future; so I am afraid I shall not have the chance to hand him over to the authorities

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to be dealt with as he deserves. Also, I don't at all like the idea of Jack and the O'Mores travelling the whole way from here to Greytown alone. Still, they are almost certain to fall in with other parties 'trekking' southward; and if so, they ought to be safe enough, for an *impi* would hardly reach them before they could get across the Tugela. Well, I must hurry up and not dawdle dreaming here, or I shall not be home till morning. Come Tommy, step out my boy, I daresay you are tired; but you shall have a good long rest in an hour or so. Get along!"

Thus adjured, Tommy broke into a trot once more, shook his head in response to his master's voice until the curb chain jingled again, and presently went cantering away down the slope of the hill leading to the Umhalatuzana ford as though he knew that his stable and plenty of "horse-feed" were not far away.

Occupied as he was by his thoughts, Hugh was cantering along quietly, sitting loosely in his saddle, when Tommy suddenly shied violently and almost unseated him. He retained his grip on the saddle by an effort, however, and immediately glanced round to ascertain the cause of his horse's sudden fright, dropping his hand instinctively into his pistol pocket as he did so. It was then made apparent that the horse's keener sense of danger had saved his rider from dashing right into an ambush from which he would probably never have emerged alive; for even as Hugh glanced up and drew his pistol he heard a loud "whirring" sound, and wheeled Tommy sharply round just in the nick of time to avoid a shower of assegais which whistled past him, showing bright and silvery in the brilliant light of the full moon.

Even in this moment of danger, Hugh's thoughts were only for his young brother ; for, he told himself, if the enemy had come thus far south, there would be no escape for any of the whites. But a second glance showed him the true state of affairs, for the spear throwers now dashed out of their cover and Marchmont saw that there were only a dozen or so of them altogether. This, then, was no advance guard of the Zulu army, but merely a small body of men detached for some special purpose ; and the young man at once guessed what that purpose was. They were in all probability waiting at the ford for another consignment of guns and ammunition ; but, if so, where was the waggon containing them ; and, moreover, where was the gun-runner himself ? Not very far away, one might be certain ! In a moment Hugh realized that he had arrived most opportunely—for could he but drive off the Zulus, he would be able himself to lie in wait for the consignment, and may-be capture the smuggler red-handed.

But the young man had very little time allowed him in which to form any connected plan, for directly the natives saw that their spears had missed their mark they charged out from the shelter of the scrub, making straight for Hugh and throwing another shower of assegais as they came. Contrary to their usual custom however, they attacked in silence, instead of raising their ferocious war-cry—possibly because there was only a few of them and they knew not how quickly the sound might bring the white people upon them. By bending low in his saddle, Hugh escaped this volley also, but one of the weapons lodged in poor Tommy's near hindquarter, making him plunge and rear with pain and alarm. Marchmont, however,

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pulled out the assegai, and poising it for a moment, hurled it with all his strength at the foremost Zulu, who was now only a few yards distant, striking him full upon the chest. The fellow, a savage of enormous stature, was not prepared for this mode of attack, and was just a second too late in raising his shield; the assegai pierced the leopard-skin "karos" which he was wearing, and as the wearer fell forward on his face with his hands clutching wildly at the assegai haft, Hugh saw the point, red and wet, protruding between his shoulders. It had been a very good cast—for an amateur.

The remaining Zulus were not in the least daunted by the death of their chief, but came on with intense determination and fury. They had fortunately each brought with them but two throwing assegais; the only weapons that now remained to them, therefore, were their broad-bladed *ixwas*, or stabbing assegais. And before they could get to close enough quarters to use these formidable weapons, Hugh raised his revolver, and carefully levelling it, pulled the trigger. The leading Zulu sprang convulsively into the air and a moment later came crashing to the ground under Tommy's hoofs, upon which the maddened horse promptly trampled out of the body what life there might have been left in it. A third man fell and then a fourth, just as he had raised his assegai to drive it into Hugh's body. But unfortunately the young Englishman missed with his next barrel, and now quite unchecked, the savages were upon him in a moment.

Then began a struggle for life which Hugh will never forget. He shot one man with one of his two remaining cartridges just as one of the Zulus, who was unable for the moment to reach the rider, dashed his

deadly *ixwa* into poor Tommy's throat, severing all the principal arteries. The noble animal who had served his master so gallantly and well, snorted furiously, and rising on his hind legs, dashed out his slayer's brains with his ironshod forehoofs. It was Tommy's last effort, however, for the next moment he sank upon his knees and rolled over on his side, Hugh luckily pitching clear of the falling animal, who again saved his master's life by receiving an assegai stab intended for Marchmont.

Hugh was on his feet in an instant, and was just in time to level his pistol again as the Zulus rushed at him. There was but one cartridge left now, and the white man did not miss this time ; and by a strange and lucky accident the heavy .450 bullet ploughed clean through the foremost man, killing him on the spot, and broke the arm of another savage who was just behind him. Then, dropping the now useless pistol into his pocket, Hugh quickly stooped, and before the remaining savages could guess what he was about, picked up the assegai and shield of the man whom he had just shot, and charged the enemy before they had recovered from their astonishment.

He succeeded in assegaing one of them before the man could raise his shield, but in a second the remainder were upon him like dogs upon a bull. Spears seemed to be flashing everywhere around him and Marchmont thought that his last hour had arrived, for within the space of half a dozen seconds he had received as many wounds which, although happily only trifling, were causing him the loss of a considerable quantity of blood. Luckily he remembered at this critical moment that he had his bandolier still round his waist, and he knew that it was at least half full of cartridges. There was only one chance left for him, and Hugh was not slow to

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take it. Glancing hastily round as he stabbed with one hand and guarded himself by means of the shield with the other, he saw a clump of trees only some twenty yards away on his left hand and in an instant he made up his mind what to do.

Seizing his opportunity, he stabbed furiously at the face of the man nearest to him and then, dropping the assegai, dashed at full speed for the clump of trees, feeling at the bandolier for more cartridges as he ran. The Zulus, expecting no such move, were taken completely by surprise for a few seconds and Hugh thus gained a few yards start; and as he was assured that they would never dream of throwing their stabbing assegais, he felt that he was safe if he could only keep the lead. Without looking round he drew the pistol from his pocket and with a quick motion threw open the breech, ejecting the empty shells as he did so. Then he drew half a dozen cartridges from his belt and thrust them one by one into the revolver chambers as he ran. By the time that he had reached the first tree he had only one more cartridge to put in, and that was inserted and the breech snapped tight just as the leading native came within stabbing distance.

Hugh was safe now, however, for he had as many cartridges at his disposal as there were savages left, and, after dropping the first man, he calmly shot two more as they came running up. The other three, realizing now that Hugh had the better of them, did not wait to argue the matter out, but swung away from the clump of trees and took to their heels as hard as they could run, with three heavy revolver bullets flying after them to hasten their pace. The imminent danger was passed; but Hugh reminded himself that there was still the gun-runner to reckon with;

and he might be expected to put in an appearance at any moment. He therefore reloaded the empty chambers of his revolver and ran quickly down the bank of the river, taking care, however, to keep well under cover of the bushes. Arrived there he took a long look round and ahead, in order to see whether there was any sign of an approaching waggon; and although at first he could see nothing, he had scarcely time to hastily bind up the worst of his wounds with his pocket handkerchief when he caught sight of a little patch of something moving, which was shining bright in the white light of the moon. Hugh looked long and carefully at it, and after a scrutiny of several moments' duration he assured himself that it was the canvas top of a waggon, which was undoubtedly moving toward the ford. It would take about twenty minutes, he reckoned, for the waggon to reach the river, and his chief hope now was that the gun-runner had not heard the reports of his revolver while he was fighting the Zulus.

After marking the spot where the waggon would enter the ford, Hugh quickly ran back to the place where the faithful Tommy was lying dead, and hastily removed the saddle and bridle. Then, without waiting to remove his clothes, the young man plunged into the river, which in the middle was swirling to the height of his waist, and after a few minutes, emerged on the opposite bank very wet and somewhat short of breath after his tussle with the water. He had tied the revolver to the saddle and had placed the latter, together with the bridle, on his head, fastening his bandolier round his neck; these articles were therefore perfectly dry although his clothes were dripping wet to the height of his waist. It was the work of a very few seconds to hide the saddle under a clump of bush, and Marchmont

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then replaced his bandolier and looked round for a place in which he could conceal himself. He found a large boulder of granite which would very well serve his purpose standing close beside the track by which the waggon must approach the ford, and crouched behind it just as the white waggon-cover appeared over the top of a low hill about a couple of hundred yards away.

From his hiding place Hugh then proceeded to take stock of the "outfit," and to his great satisfaction saw that there was only one horseman with it, who was riding close alongside the waggon, and now and again urging the tired bullocks forward with a stock whip which he cracked continually, possibly as a signal to the Zulus whom he expected to be waiting his arrival. This satisfied Hugh that he would have only one opponent to deal with, and that opponent would almost certainly prove to be the gun-runner himself; for Marchmont knew that the Kafir driver and the Hottentot *voerlooper* would never dream of interfering in a quarrel between two white men. They would calmly sit down and watch the encounter, holding themselves quite ready to take their orders from whichever man should come off victor. It would be very strange, he thought, if he could not "get the drop" on the gun-runner, secure him and the consignment of arms, and march the whole back to Katana before morning.

By the time that Hugh had noted everything that was necessary, the heavy, rumbling waggon, with its team of sixteen oxen, was only about sixty yards away; and the Hottentot *voerlooper*, leading the first couple of bullocks, was nearly abreast of the boulder. The young Englishman was in the deep shadow cast by the boulder, so he believed that the *voerlooper* would not

see him, being too much occupied with the work of keeping the oxen to the road—though it would be very awkward for Hugh if the native should happen to do so, for he would of course shout an alarm and thus put the gun-runner on his guard before he could be reached. Luckily, however, nothing happened, and the leading pair of oxen went lumbering past, their laboured breathing speaking eloquently of the weight of their load and the speed at which they had come.

Just as the *voerlooper* had passed and Hugh was striving to catch a glimpse of the smuggler's face, the latter called out in Dutch: "Hi! Mompela, do you see any sign of the *Amazulu* who were to have met us here? I cannot see the rascals anywhere. Pull up a moment and go forward and shout across the water. I hope the lazy hounds won't be late," he growled to himself; "it's rather too risky a business to wait about here; and I'll be shot if I'm going to carry this cargo any farther for anyone."

"No, *Baas*," replied the native, "I can't see any Zulus over yonder; but I will go forward and have a look."

Hugh smiled as the little *voerlooper* left the oxen and ran down to the river bank, for he knew that the only Zulus in the vicinity were dead ones. Presently Mompela lifted up his voice and sent it ringing across the water, but there was no response, only a dismal, empty echo came back from the rocks and trees bordering the opposite bank.

"Confound it all!" growled the white man, still speaking in the *taal*, when Mompela had been screaming himself hoarse in the endeavour to make the dead hear, "where are the infernal scoundrels? They surely would not fail me, for it is a good deal more to their

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advantage than mine that they should get the guns. Here, that will do, Mompela, I will ride across and see whether I can find any traces of them," he added, spurring his horse forward.

Now was the time for action thought Hugh, as the man came galloping along, and he rose from his knees behind the boulder and gripped the revolver ready to spring out when the smuggler passed.

"Halt!" shouted Marchmont as the man clattered up. "Halt and throw up your hands—your game is at an end!"

With a fearful oath the fellow pulled his horse on to its haunches, and as Hugh stepped out into the open, slipped his hand behind him to his pistol holster; but Marchmont saw the action, and levelling his own weapon, sent a bullet through the head of the gunrunner's horse, tumbling man and beast to the ground together. The smuggler was, however, an active man and a splendid rider, and even as the poor brute fell over on its side he slipped his feet out of the stirrups and fell on one knee behind the horse's body, from which partial shelter he fired a couple of shots at Hugh before the latter could do anything further. Hugh quickly replied, however, but in the excitement of the moment his aim was faulty, and one bullet plugged into the ground a few yards behind the gunrunner, while the second knocked off the man's hat, disclosing the features of Manoel Salvaterra!

"By heavens!" exclaimed Hugh aloud in his astonishment, "O'More was right after all! You infernal scoundrel!" he growled to the man, as he ran forward to close with him. "I'll put a stop to your little game, now and for ever." But he was within an ace of receiving his own quietus, for Salvaterra, rendered

desperate by the thought that if he were captured, he would probably be lynched, was firing at Hugh with the coolness of a man whose whole future was at stake, and as Marchmont dashed forward he felt a sharp burning sensation in his left shoulder which told him that a bullet had touched it.

Luckily though it broke no bones, having merely scored the fleshy part of the limb, and before the gun-runner could pull the trigger again Hugh was upon him and had seized the fellow's right wrist in a grip of iron. Then began the fight for the mastery which the Kafirs often tell amongst themselves, having heard it from Mompela and the Kafir driver Umbopa, the two witnesses of the encounter. These two came running up as Hugh closed with Salvaterra and for the moment the former thought they were going to assist their master, but they did nothing of the sort ; and Marchmont was left alone to fight for his life with a desperate criminal ; for there was no doubt that the Portuguese would kill him without the slightest compunction if he happened to come off victor.

Directly Marchmont seized Salvaterra's pistol wrist he was obliged to drop his own weapon, which was now empty, to prevent the gun-runner from seizing him by the throat and throttling him outright ; and thenceforward it was a fight for the possession of Salvaterra's weapon which still had two cartridges remaining in its chambers. The smuggler was an immensely powerful man as Hugh soon discovered, but he reckoned that his own endurance was the greater, if only he did not become exhausted by loss of blood. With a furious wrench Salvaterra strove to pull his wrist out of Hugh's grip, and so sudden was the movement that it almost succeeded. As it was it twisted Marchmont off his

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feet and he fell upon his knees, bringing the Portuguese down on top of him and the two rolled on the ground with the smuggler uppermost. The shock of falling heavily on his back dazed Hugh for a brief second or two, and the next thing that he knew was that there was a brilliant flash before his eyes, a sharp report and a stinging sensation along the side of his head. The gun-runner had only missed blowing out his brains by a fraction of an inch.

Before the fellow could pull the trigger again however, Marchmont had recovered his strength, and with a mighty effort twisted Salvaterra's wrist round until the deadly revolver pointed away from himself. Then slowly but surely he forced the gun-runner's left hand backward until it was close to the man's own throat, and then suddenly releasing his hold on the wrist, Hugh darted his hand forward and gripped his adversary's throat in a clasp of steel, at the same time flinging his own head backward to avoid the fellow's free hand. Salvaterra seemed then to realize that it was all up with him, for instead of trying to pull Hugh's hand away he grasped vainly at the empty air, while his eyes became glassy with terror and bulged outward until it seemed as if they must burst from their sockets. Then his face began to turn purple, the veins stood out on his forehead like whipcord, he made a choking sound in his throat as though he were trying to cough, and then suddenly collapsed and lay motionless on the ground.

Hugh, fearing that his enemy might be feigning to be further gone than he really was, and deciding not to take any risks, raised the fellow's head and hammered it once or twice on the hard ground in order to insure full insensibility; then, as the man uttered a hollow groan and fell back limp upon the grass, Hugh picked

up the two pistols and rose to his feet, wiping the streaming perspiration from his forehead as he did so.

"Now you two," he exclaimed to the natives, "hurry up and fetch me a *reim* ; there are sure to be plenty in the waggon ; help me tie this man up securely, and I will do my best to keep you out of the hands of the *amapolis* (police). If you refuse I will see that you meet with the fate which your master will certainly receive." And he touched the senseless smuggler with his boot.

The two natives needed no second bidding, for they knew that, if he pleased, Hugh could get them five years' imprisonment as Salvaterra's accessories ; and they ran quickly to the waggon, presently reappearing with several lengths of raw-hide rope, with which Marchmont immediately proceeded to bind his captive. This having been done, he ordered the natives to pick up the inanimate form of Salvaterra and carry it to the waggon, where it was laid upon a pile of ammunition cases. The oxen were then turned round, and under Hugh's directions the waggon set off for Katana, which was reached just as the day was beginning to dawn. Marchmont drove straight to the Court House, where he found the magistrate already present, and delivered the waggon and his prisoner to that functionary.

Salvaterra, who by that time had recovered consciousness, was then released from his bonds only to exchange them for a pair of handcuffs, after which he was placed in a cell until it could be decided what to do with him. With regard to the cargo of rifles and ammunition, Hugh and the magistrate decided that it would be a pity to destroy them, especially at the present juncture, when they might prove to be exceedingly valuable, the former therefore decided to run the consignment over to

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Eshowe under convoy of the detachment of the Mounted Riflemen which he was to take there on the following morning.

These arrangements having been completed, Marchmont went over to the iron shanty where his men were mustering, in order to see how matters were progressing there ; and then returned to his own bungalow to make a few necessary preparations before he rode over to " Moyeni " to say good-bye to his brother, the being he loved best in the world.

CHAPTER V

PARTED

EIGHT o'clock struck almost before Hugh had found time to turn round, but he had managed in the brief period at his disposal to put most of his small belongings together, ready for the corps transport waggon when it should come along, and his heart leapt within him as he changed out of his civilian clothes into his uniform, so as to be ready to set out directly his farewells were over, having decided to move his detachment out of Katana in the afternoon should his men be ready, instead of waiting until the following morning. For he very shrewdly surmised that Colonel Pearson would be anything but displeased to receive the detachment a day earlier than it had been ordered to arrive.

Then having locked up the bungalow—while he wondered whether it would be still standing in a week's time, or whether it would not rather have been razed to the ground by the hordes of devastating Zulus—he set out for the little "barracks," as he had come to call the galvanised iron shanty where his men were mustering, and reminded them of the order to parade outside the Court House at midday. The next thing to be done was to secure a remount to replace poor Tommy, and he soon succeeded in purchasing a remarkably handsome mare, her owner being only too thankful to change such bulky property into hard cash which he

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could carry with him much more easily than he could take a horse.

With a sturdy animal between his knees once more, Hugh galloped off towards the O'More's house and rode in through the garden gate just as Jack, who had been on the lookout for him, came rushing down the garden path.

It was a somewhat tearful little boy who greeted Hugh, albeit at the same time an indignant one, for he did not relish the idea of being separated from his brother and carried off to Greytown, and it was a few minutes before Marchmont could explain matters sufficiently to be allowed to put "Nelly"—for so he had decided to call the mare—into the stable and to seek for O'More.

"But, Hugh, I really should not be in the way, and I know Colonel Pearson wouldn't mind if I came with you. I can shoot quite well with that revolver you gave me last birthday, and I'd promise not to bother anybody," pleaded the little fellow as he clung to Hugh's arm.

Marchmont's heart ached for his young brother, and he longed to keep him by his side, but he saw clearly the impossibility of even thinking seriously of such a thing as taking the child with him, so he strove to put forward the very brightest side of the affair. "I'm afraid it really wouldn't do, Jack," he said; "and after all, perhaps this bother will prove to be quite unnecessary. When the Zulus find that we are prepared for them they may disband and return to their homes. You see, laddie, if there should be fighting and I knew that you were in danger it would double my anxiety; and in that way you would prove a hindrance instead of a help. No, you go with Mr. O'More, my boy, and I will join you in Greytown at the

very first opportunity. Greytown is a gay place, and you will find plenty to amuse you there."

Jack seemed somewhat cheered at the thought of perhaps seeing Hugh in Greytown, and went off to finish packing his few treasures, leaving the two men—for O'More had joined them—to talk over matters.

Marchmont related the events of the previous night to O'More to the latter's great amazement, for though he had thought Salvaterra a scoundrel, he had not dreamed of the extent of his villainy, and he expressed himself as well pleased that Hugh had been successful in placing the gun-runner in prison.

Time, however, waits for no man, and at last Hugh was reluctantly obliged to tear himself away from the small boy who clung to him sobbing as though his heart would break. Although the young man was himself feeling anything but cheerful, he represented matters in as favourable a light as possible, telling his brother again that in all probability Cetewayo and his hordes would be crushed before many weeks were past, and promising to write to him at every opportunity, until at last Jack so far regained his self-control as to be able to accompany him to the gate in order to see the last of his brother. O'More had already given Marchmont the address in Greytown to which he was to direct his letters, and urged him to write as soon as he reached Eshowe, as they were leaving for Natal that afternoon and would be in Greytown only a few days after Hugh reached the fort. In fact, it was just possible that Hugh and his detachment of riflemen would be passing "Moyeni" at about the time when the O'Mores were leaving it, in which case the brothers might see each other again for a few seconds before finally separating. Hugh asked O'More to forward all letters to him at

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Eshowe, when in all probability they would be sent on to him by means of a native runner or field-postman ; but he told him not to be anxious if he did not obtain letters regularly, as he believed it was often a difficult matter to find time or opportunity to write when a man was on active service and in the vicinity of the enemy.

At last all arrangements were made and the final farewells said, and with a cheerful face but a very heavy heart Hugh mounted his horse and rode away toward Katana once more, the last sight remaining in his memory—one which haunted him for many a long day—being that of a little curly-headed boy in a white suit standing on the verandah, waving a small handkerchief which, he noticed, was being frequently applied to the urchin's eyes. He endeavoured to steel his heart, however, and resolutely determined to try to make the time pass more quickly by giving up his mind entirely to looking after his own men, and to the business of slaying as many Zulus as possible. Poor Hugh ! he little dreamed of the terrible experiences which both he and his brother would have to pass through before they met again, or under what circumstances that meeting would take place !

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By the time that Marchmont reached the ford of the Umhlatusana, the site of his encounter with the Zulus and the gun-runner, he awoke from his reverie to find, to his astonishment, that it was already past midday, the hour that he had ordered his men to parade before the Court House, he therefore put spurs to Nelly and dashed along at a fast gallop for Katana, coming in sight of the Court House, which stood on the

top of a low hill, about ten minutes later. Through the clear air he could plainly see his men drawn up, awaiting the arrival of their captain, although they were still about a mile distant ; but he could also distinguish that there seemed to be a vast amount of commotion going on there in the village. Men on horseback were galloping to and fro, others were to be seen sitting motionless on their horses against the skyline, as though on patrol or scouting duty.

"This is exceedingly curious," muttered Hugh, as he urged his mare to still greater efforts, "what's in the wind now? It looks very much as though an advance guard of Cetewayo's army might be expected—and yet, unless our scouts have been grievously hoodwinked, the Zulus cannot possibly be anywhere near here! If they are, though, then God help Jack and all the women and children who have not yet got away!

A few minutes later he dashed up the slope leading to the Court House and pulled his reeking horse up on her haunches just as a grizzled old sergeant rode out to meet him, saluting and saying :

"Every man in the troop present, sir ; waggons prepared and oxen inspanned ; the two field-pieces limbered up ; and everything ready for marching as soon as you give the word."

"Very good sergeant," said Hugh. "But what is the meaning of all this fuss? I see that several of our men are out scouring the *veldt*, while there seem to be sentinels posted over there and there," pointing in the different directions. "Is there then any news of the Zulus?"

"No, sir, it's not the Zulus," answered the veteran ; "they are still a week's march away according to the

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latest information, but you will be annoyed to learn, Captain Marchmont, that the man Salvaterra whom you captured last night succeeded in escaping this morning, about a couple of hours ago ; and I therefore sent some of our men away to see if he could be overtaken and recaptured. I included a bugler with the last party, so if we sound the ' recall ' here, he will hear it and carry the signal forward to the others."

"But, good heavens, man ! " exclaimed Marchmont fiercely, " how the mischief did the scoundrel succeed in breaking gaol ? I myself saw him handcuffed and placed in a cell out of which escape was practically impossible. There must have been treachery somewhere, by the look of it. Who had charge of the man ? I must look into this at once."

"Well, sir," replied the soldier, " it is supposed that the fellow slipped his hands out of the manacles, which I am told were rather large for his wrists. He was in charge of the prison gaoler—old Clarke, you know, sir—but Clarke lies dead in the Court House armoury now. Salvaterra must have freed his hands and waited until Clarke brought in his breakfast, when, using the handcuffs as a flail, he struck the poor old man on the head, crushing in his skull like an eggshell. He must then have placed Clarke's body in the cell—for that is where it was found—possessed himself of the gaolyard keys, opened the doors and walked coolly out. He must have had a long start too, sir, because poor old Clarke was not missed until an hour ago, when his wife turned up at the gaol to know why he had not gone home to his dinner. If it had not been for the confusion in the village the man could never have escaped ; but as it is everybody is so much occupied with their own business that they have had no time_to

attend to anything else. Several people, it seems, saw Salvaterra walking away, but of course none of them knew that he had been arrested last night, so they made no effort to stop him. By all accounts, however, he got a horse from somewhere, and rode away to the northward ; so that is the direction in which I have sent away the scouting parties to see whether they can pick him up again, but all the same I am afraid, as he has not already been overtaken, that he has got clean away. By the way, sir, I was almost forgetting," went on the sergeant, fumbling in the pocket of his tunic and producing a dirty piece of paper which he handed to Hugh, " this bit of paper was found while we were searching the cell ; it is addressed to you and seems to have been left behind by the gun-runner."

"A note for me?" exclaimed Hugh, taking the missive, " that's very curious ! What can the rascal have to write to me about ? "

With eager fingers Marchmont tore the missive open, and as he read his face went black with rage and a look came into his eyes that boded ill for the Portuguese if that individual should ever fall into his hands again. The note, which was written in English, ran :

" MR. MARCHMONT,

If this letter ever reaches your hands, you will know that in spite of your kind attentions of last night, I have managed to get away. I shall never be recaptured, for I made plans years ago in case such a contingency as the present should ever arise. I have certain trusty friends in the neighbourhood who will be only too glad to help me to escape, and I shall make my way to them. Once in their hands I am safe. I want you to remember, however, that I owe

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you a debt which I shall never be able fully to repay, although I shall pay as much of it as I possibly can. I will not rest until I have destroyed you and those who are dear to you. This is no idle threat as you will find, for you shall live to regret the day when you saw fit to meddle with—

Your henceforward implacable enemy,

MANOEL SALVATERRA."

For one brief moment a thrill of something very like fear ran through Marchmont's heart as he read the threat respecting his brother—for of course that was what the man meant—and his hands opened and shut convulsively; but a second thought reminded him that Jack was leaving that day for Greytown in O'More's charge; and he decided further to insure the boy's safety by sending his Kafir servant Soye along with him as a kind of personal bodyguard. He therefore crumpled up the piece of paper and stuffed it into his pocket, remarking to the sergeant, who could scarcely restrain his curiosity: "Nothing but a jumble of idle threats, Leigh, of which it would be more than foolish to take any notice. As you know, I was responsible for the rascal's capture, and he appears to think that he has a grudge against me on that account; but I do not very well see what harm he can do. However, I am afraid I must recall the men who are out searching for the fugitive, as we cannot really afford the time to scour the country for him. Having secured such a long start, he will probably be miles beyond our reach by this time, so sound the 'recall,' sergeant, and let us be on the move."

"Very good, sir," answered the sergeant, who was only too glad to recall his men from what he guessed at

the outset must prove a fruitless errand ; and he gave the necessary orders to the bugler who had been sent out with the scouting parties, and a few minutes later the riflemen began to return by twos and threes, and immediately took up their places in the ranks, having first reported that no sign of the fugitive had been seen.

Then when the customary last straggler had put in an appearance, the roll was called and every man being found to be present, Marchmont formed up his little troop, and with waggons rumbling and field-pieces bumping, the detachment of two hundred men rode out of Katana on its way to Eshowe and glory, to the accompaniment of rousing cheers from the few inhabitants of the place who had not already packed up and left the village.

An hour and a half later the contingent came in sight of the O'More's farm, and to his great relief Hugh saw that the farmer was on the point of departure. Jack was standing by the off fore-wheel of the wagon which they were going to use for a house for the next week or so, and he waved his handkerchief gaily at the sight of his brother and his troop, to the immense delight of the men, with whom the boy was a great favourite. The soldiers waved their hats in reply and shouted good-humoured pleasantries and many wishes for a comfortable journey.

Hugh had already made up his mind that he would speak to O'More about Salvaterra's letter, even though he was technically committing a breach of discipline by leaving his troop while on the march, for such a purpose. He therefore called up Leigh and ordered him to take command for a few minutes, since he wished particularly to speak to Mr. O'More on business. The worthy sergeant saluted, replying : " Very good, sir ! "

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And Marchmont wheeling to the left and putting spurs to his horse, dashed up alongside the waggon and threw the reins to Soye who, as had been arranged, was accompanying the O'Mores' to Greytown to act as an especial bodyguard to Jack on the journey; and who was then to come north again to rejoin his master wherever the latter might chance to be.

O'More came forward when he saw Hugh and listened carefully to the latter's account of the gun-runner's escape, and an angry frown gathered on his brow when he heard of the threatening letter, but he merely said :

"I would not think any more about that scoundrel, Marchmont; the letter was, no doubt, written more with the idea of making you uneasy than with any real intention of carrying out the threat. We will take the greatest care of Jack, you may be sure; and as Soye has your orders never to let the boy out of his sight, it would be a difficult matter for any harm to come to him.

Somewhat relieved by these words, Hugh made his parting very brief, and with a hurried "good-bye," called for Soye, leaped on the horse which the man brought, and galloped away after his squadron, of which no traces now remained save a cloud of dust which hovered over the *veldt* about a mile away.

Three days later the weary men marched into Eshowe, where they found Colonel Pearson greatly pleased at their arrival a day sooner than he had expected them, and presently they received the most recent war news, which was to the effect that the Zulus were advancing in force from Ulundi and might be expected at Eshowe in two or three days' time at the utmost. Several detached bodies of troops were on their way to Zululand, and it was just a question whether those

under Colonels Glyn and Woods would arrive in the neighbourhood in time to save Eshowe from a siege, or whether the little fort and its gallant defenders would be surrounded and cut off before the British troops could get there.

The colonel found himself in somewhat of a quandary, for all the various rifle corps and contingents of mounted police were mustering at Eshowe, and in the event of the place being besieged it was very doubtful whether it would hold them all. Pearson was therefore anxiously waiting for more definite news from the south as to the whereabouts of the troops which were coming up from Natal, pending which he scarcely knew what arrangements to make with regard to the Irregular Horse now under his command, which was almost hourly arriving in twos and threes from the most distant districts. Meanwhile, Hugh and his detachment went into camp under the walls of Eshowe fort and did what everyone else was doing—waited impatiently for the clarion note of war.

CHAPTER VI

ISANDHLWANA

ALTHOUGH Colonel Pearson was almost hourly expecting an attack by the Zulus, day after day passed and still the scouts—who were thrown out for miles round the neighbourhood—brought in no news of their approach, nor was any news to be obtained from the south as to the movements of the troops coming up in that direction. In fact Eshowe and the men there seemed to have been entirely forgotten, while the soldiers grumbled daily at being “out of all the fun,” as they phrased it. New Year’s Day came and went, with still no news of the enemy and no sign of the Imperial troops; and it was not until the thirteenth of January, when everybody’s patience was completely exhausted, that a very tired messenger in the uniform of the Natal Carbineers, rode wearily up to the gate of the fort and demanded to be taken at once to the Commanding Officer.

In a single moment the gloom and despondency which hung over the camp were completely dissipated, their place being taken by an eager curiosity which was soon afterwards exchanged for joyous anticipation when it became known that the Carbineer had brought a message to the effect that Colonel Glyn, in charge of the main column, and accompanied by the General

himself, Lord Chelmsford, had crossed the Tugela at Rorke's Drift two days previously and was now marching to attack the Kraal of U'Sirayo, a powerful Zulu chief, whose stronghold was situated among the fastnesses of the 'Nqutu Mountains.

What gave the men the greatest satisfaction, however, was the fact that the message also contained the news that Lord Chelmsford intended to encamp at Isandhlwana as soon as he had destroyed U'Sirayo's stronghold, preparatory to pressing forward into the heart of Zululand in order to strike, if possible, a sudden decisive blow at Cetewayo, wherever he might be found, and before the Zulu king was prepared to meet him; and as the General knew that he would need to be considerably reinforced before he pressed on any further, he has also sent instructions to Colonel Pearson that that officer was to send forward to the camp at Isandhlwana as many men as he could spare from Eshowe, and to retain only as many as would serve him to hold the place.

Then ensued tremendous excitement throughout the camp, for everybody was heartily tired of sitting still and doing nothing; and although nobody could of course yet tell which regiments, parts of regiments, or corps would be sent forward to join the Commander-in-Chief, every man hoped that his detachment would be one of the favoured ones. Their anxiety was not however allayed until two days later, when the whole force under Pearson's command was paraded before the fort, and it was announced that fifty Border Riflemen, a hundred Mounted Police, fifty Durban Hussars, fifty Newcastle Rifles, twenty of the Buffalo Border Guard, and the detachment of two hundred Zululand Mounted Rifles, which was under the command of

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Hugh Marchmont, making altogether a force of four hundred and seventy mounted men, were to be despatched to the camp at Isandhlwana. These were all that could be spared from Eshowe, the remainder being required to defend the fort, which Lord Chelmsford had commanded should be held at all hazards.

When this decision became known, nothing could exceed the delight of the men chosen to go, unless it were the disappointment and chagrin of those unfortunates who were obliged to remain behind in the place where most of them had already spent so many weary weeks, and many were the impromptu combats which took place in certain secluded spots about the fort ere all ill-feeling was cleared away by the departure of the detachment for the front, Captain Hugh Marchmont being placed in command of it until such time as he should transfer the command to Colonel Glyn, or the Commander-in-Chief, whichever he might happen to first meet.

On the following morning therefore, the sixteenth of January, 1879, at six o'clock, the devoted little band commenced its march to the *rendezvous* at Isandhlwana. As the month of January corresponds pretty closely with the English period of midsummer, and as the heat was intense, Hugh and his five hundred men were obliged to make an early start in order to cover as great a distance as possible before the midday heat became too great to allow of marching in comfort; but early as was the hour, it did not prevent the garrison of Eshowe from turning out *en masse* to give their comrades a rousing "send off," and it is absolutely certain that not a single man among all those defenders of the Empire dreamed that, within a week, fully threequarters of those who marched away, confidently

anticipating victory, would be lying cold and stark under the stars, upon that fatal field which men call Isandhlwana—the meaning of which is, in the Zulu tongue, “The place of the Little Hand.”

During the whole of the march, Hugh, like a careful officer, kept his scouts thrown well out all round the main body, to guard against those sudden attacks to which the Zulus, in common with most other savage races, are so partial—but not a sign of the enemy did they see ; and on the twentieth of the month the force came in sight of a mountain lying away to the north-westward, in shape remarkably resembling a gigantic lion, which the Kafir guide informed Hugh was the mountain of the “Little Hand.”

It was not until late in the afternoon that Captain Marchmont and his four hundred and seventy men passed round the base of the mountain and saw the multitude of white tents which indicated the encampment of the English troops, and when they arrived on the ground and Hugh had reported himself, he found that the main body itself had only arrived a few hours previously, having been somewhat delayed by the storming of U'Sirayo's fortress, and the necessity to make a wide detour to avoid the marshy ground which abounds in the neighbourhood of Isandhlwana. A spot was pointed out to Hugh on which he might pitch his camp, and by the time that the first bright star of evening appeared, his tired men were comfortably housed under canvas, while most of them were fast asleep when Hugh changed into his mess uniform to go across to dine with the officers and to learn the latest news with regard to the enemy.

Late that same evening a patrol party consisting of Police Riflemen and a part of the Native Contingent left

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the camp under Major Dartnell, and started away in the direction of Matayana's stronghold for the purpose of reconnoitring the position of the main Zulu army, and also if possible to drive Matayana himself out of his fastness. No alarm was caused by the fact that the party were absent all night, but when up to the following midday Dartnell had still not returned, the Commander-in-Chief began to feel somewhat anxious concerning him; indeed Lord Chelmsford was on the point of sending out reinforcements in the direction which Dartnell had taken when a blue-coated horseman was seen riding for his life just beyond the long spur which runs out from the foot of the mountain. When the horseman arrived in camp it was well on in the afternoon, and he brought a message to the effect that as the Zulu main body was approaching Major Dartnell's position in great force, the major desired to know whether he should fall back upon Isandhlwana, or whether Lord Chelmsford would send out reinforcements. After a few minutes' consideration the Commander-in-Chief decided that as Matayana's place was one of considerable strategic importance, he would himself march out to reinforce his subordinate, and he despatched a message to the major to that effect. However, as it was now so late that it would be dark before the troops could get on the move, and as there was at that time no moon, Lord Chelmsford finally so far modified his arrangements as to defer the march until next morning at daybreak, it being regarded as a too dangerous task to undertake a night march in that part of the country on account of the marshy nature of the ground.

Accordingly at dawn on that fatal day of the twenty-second of January, Lord Chelmsford and Colonel Glyn

marched out of the camp to the relief of Major Dartnell, leaving only a small force at Isandhlwana under the command of Major Pulleine. One hundred and fifty of Marchmont's Riflemen went with the relieving force, and much to his disgust, Hugh was left in command of the residue, as well as of the few other remaining men of the Irregular Mounted Corps.

Scarcely had the General vanished from sight ere isolated bodies of Zulus began to put in an appearance, some showing plainly against the skyline on the top of the mountain, while others hovered about the aforementioned spur which juts out from the base of the hill. Hugh was the first man to observe these stragglers, but it was not until their number began noticeably to increase that he thought it necessary to draw Pulleine's attention to the fact. As soon as he did so, however, that officer immediately sent out a strong scouting party, with instructions minutely to observe how many Zulus were in the vicinity, and how their forces were disposed.

The scouting party was away three hours on its tour of inspection, and it was nine o'clock before they returned to camp with the startling information that the Zulus were massing in force at the back of the mountain and that there were ten or eleven *impis* present, representing twenty-three to twenty-four thousand men. Yet strange to say, very little alarm was felt, and no attempt of any kind was made to fortify the camp! Instead, by a most lamentable error of judgment, the force at Pulleine's disposal was broken up and sent out in small parties all round the camp, it being thought that these scattered handfuls of men would be sufficient to roll back the now rapidly-advancing Zulu hordes.

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At ten o'clock Colonel Durnford and three hundred native troops arrived from the direction of Krous Kop, having somehow missed the relieving force under Lord Chelmsford, but had the Zulus not been anxious to get as many of their foes as possible into the trap he would never have been permitted to reach his comrades, for the *impis* purposely delayed their advance in order to let him and his force pass through. With this small reinforcement, the strength under Colonel Pulleine now amounted to a little over seven hundred Europeans and six hundred native levies. There were five hundred men of the 24th regiment, eighty Artillery, about forty Mounted Police, Hugh's fifty riflemen, thirty of the Natal Carbineers, twenty of the Buffalo Border Guard, and a squad of Newcastle Riflemen.

Directly Colonel Durnford and his men entered the doomed circle of the encampment, the Zulus resumed their advance, seeming to appear from all points at once, and it was soon seen that their *impis* were deploying from each end of the mountain, converging in two semicircles upon the camp. As they came forward the two lines of men extended farther and farther toward one another until the English were completely surrounded by a circle of Zulus all dressed in their war trappings and eager for the blood of the invaders of their country. For a few brief minutes there was a space between the extremities of the two horns of the crescent through which a few well-mounted men might have got away, even at the last moment, to carry the news to Lord Chelmsford and the main body; but strangely enough, not one of that doomed band of heroes seemed to realize, even now, that victory for the English was an impossibility in the face of such overwhelming odds, and that nothing but death awaited

the whole of them. A few minutes more and the open avenue of escape lessened and then closed entirely ; and as the two horns of the crescent came together, shutting in the English with an impenetrable ring of steel, the Zulus raised their awful, heart-shaking war chant, at the same time advancing to the attack. The battle of Isandhlwana was about to begin !

The first shot was fired by one of Hugh's twelve-pounder field-pieces, both of which had been left behind at Isandhlwana by Lord Chelmsford, and the shell, beautifully aimed, flew shrieking toward the advancing Zulu masses, to burst with devastating effect in the very spot where both horns of the crescent had just united ; but although the Zulus for yards round were blown to pieces, fresh men rushed up, fighting for precedence ; the gap was filled, and still shouting their terrible war chant, the enemy came on without a pause, rattling their shields and brandishing their assegais, thinking of nothing but coming to close grips with the British as soon as possible. In a few minutes the black mass, like a hugh wave sweeping over the ground, had reached the foremost outpost of the handful of white men, and the air became literally dark with showers of flying assegais ; and although the squad of Englishmen replied with a withering volley, it was the last that gallant band ever fired—for the next moment the Zulus swept over and engulfed those who had survived that deadly spear shower, annihilated them, and pressed onward in scarcely diminished numbers.

Meanwhile, Marchmont had been firing his field-pieces steadily and doing frightful execution among the enemy, until the Zulus met the outposts, when of course, it became impossible to fire any longer for fear of

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destroying friend and foe together. Deprived then of the support afforded by the guns, the outposts began to crumple up and disappear, as a child's sand castle does before the advancing tide ; and in a few minutes the colonel saw that, unless he recalled the outlying men, they would be killed in detail ere ever they had an opportunity to form a square—the only formation at all likely to resist the impetuous charges of the dauntless Zulus. He therefore ordered the bugler to sound the recall, and the notes shrilled weirdly over that doomed field, but alas ! Pulleine had delayed action just a little too long, for the outposts, in groups of ten to a dozen men, were even now surrounded and fighting desperately for life, falling one by one, covered with wounds, under the fell stroke of the broad-bladed stabbing assegais ; and the colonel saw, as soon as the bugle call had ceased, that unless some decisive step were taken, all those men who were still separated from the main body would be irretrievably lost. Pulleine was sadly deficient in horsemen, so many of that arm having been withdrawn by Lord Chelmsford for his futile reconnoitring expedition ; but as he looked with haggard eyes round the field his glance fell upon Hugh and his men, most of whom had dismounted and were now busily engaged in serving their field-pieces and two other guns which they had dragged up from another part of the field, being now able to recommence firing since there was no longer any danger of hitting their comrades, most of whom were by this time dead.

For a moment Pulleine's eye brightened with a gleam of something like hope, for forty mounted men might accomplish wonders, even to saving those who seemed already doomed ; and he called up an orderly,

telling him to ride with all speed to Captain Marchmont and give him orders to mount his troop and charge the Zulus wherever it could be seen that a handful of mounted infantry might be saved. Immediately upon receiving the order Hugh glanced round the field and he soon saw that he was being called upon to perform the absolutely impossible—he was being ordered to charge an army of twenty thousand furious savages with fifty mounted men ! Well, it was all in the day's work, although it seemed a pity to sacrifice his men in an unavailing effort to save those who were already hopelessly lost ; it would have been much better to have formed a hollow square with the men still left, in the hope of being able to hold out unbroken until the General should return. As Hugh gave the order to mount and sprang into his own saddle, he saw, not a hundred yards away, a small squad of about fifty Natal Carbineers who were evidently preparing to charge the enemy on their own account, and as there was no time to ask for instructions from the colonel, Marchmont at once sent orders to them to join his own small squadron, which they immediately did, bringing the number of men up to about a hundred.

Hugh then looked round the field to discover where a charge would be most advantageous, and his quick eye picked out a swaying scarlet patch, about two hundred yards away, where some forty or fifty men of the 24th were fighting madly for their lives, thrusting and stabbing with their blood-stained bayonets in a mighty effort to prevent the black mass from rolling over and annihilating them. In a second he had pointed out the spot to his men, who had already dropped their rifles and drawn their sabres, and with a short, sharp word of command he waved his sword

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above his head, and at the head of his handful of cavalry went thundering along to the rescue of the redcoats.

The Zulus saw them coming and immediately set up a yell of execration and defiance, which was quickly changed to shrieks and groans as the horsemen deploying on each side of the men of the 24th dashed headlong into the seething mass of the enemy, who recoiled involuntarily under the shock. Then ensued a perfect inferno of a fight during which the torn remnant of the infantry quickly pulled themselves together, and under cover of the cavalry charge, retreated with all speed to the main body. Hugh's mare, urged on by voice and spur, had carried her rider fully a couple of lengths in advance of the rest of the troop, and the gallant young officer almost immediately found himself surrounded and hemmed in by a sea of savage, snarling faces, while the air seemed to fairly hum with the sound of flying assegais. He felt his horse give a sudden violent plunge which almost unseated him, and Hugh knew that she had been badly stabbed, or perhaps hamstrung, by some Zulu. The plunge, however, saved his life, for it threw him forward just as a native lunged fiercely at his unprotected left side with a hugh broad-bladed *ixwa*. The spear thus flew behind Hugh's back, and the savage himself fell forward against the mare, which instantly smashed in his head with her plunging iron-shod hoofs.

Marchmont soon saw that he was in a very tight place, fully half his men had been killed, while he himself, by some marvel, remained alive in the centre of an ever increasing crowd of Zulus. Obviously, it was high time to think of getting out of the mess, and with a herculean effort he managed to swing Nelly

round with her head toward the camp. Then with the fury of desperation he began to swing his long cavalry sabre, already streaming red from point to hilt, and with such savage good-will did he wield it that it sheared through spear haft and buffalo-hide shield as though these tough weapons were made of paper. For a brief moment the Zulus fell back in dismay before so furious an onslaught, for someone among them had shouted "*yena m'tagati!*" (he is a wizard); and indeed the young officer did appear at that moment to be something more than a mere mortal. The black mass parted for a second and Hugh was not slow to avail himself of the opportunity. With another hail of swinging cuts he mowed down the few men who still barred his progress, and the next moment rode out of the press and joined his comrades, who now alas! were reduced to about a quarter of their strength.

"We can do no more!" yelled Marchmont, "we shall all be speared as we stand if we remain here any longer. Form up as best you can and retire on the main body!"

Such was the fearful din of the fighting, however, that although Hugh's lips moved, no sound could be heard proceeding from them, but the soldiers guessed by his gestures what he meant, and they at once turned their horses and headed back toward the camp, with the Zulus, now recovered from their momentary consternation, yelling in full pursuit. Marchmont was the last man to get clear, but when he did so he was about ten yards behind his men, with the Zulus close behind him darkening the air with their flying assegais. Unfortunately, in consequence of the gun-runner's nefarious traffic, many of the savages were possessed

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of good rifles, and one or two of them now halted and began to fire after the flying horsemen. Consequently, Hugh had not gone a hundred yards before he felt the mare wince and shiver, and a moment later she snorted violently and went crashing to the ground, throwing her rider over her head, while the Zulus, with shouts of triumph, dashed along to spear the helpless man as he lay half-stunned upon the ground.

Luckily however, for Hugh, one or two of his men had turned in their saddles to see where the shots were coming from, hoping that they heralded the approach of the General with the relieving force, and they were just in time to see their captain fall. Like a flash the plucky fellows wheeled round and charged back to Marchmont, who had by this time staggered to his feet, prepared to sell his life dearly. As they ranged up alongside, one of the men shouted: "Catch hold of the stirrup-leathers, sir, and we will pull you clear." Marchmont at once jumped between the horses and, seizing a stirrup-leather in each hand, said: "Away with you, boys, I've got a good grip!" and the two men immediately galloped off toward the camp, dragging Hugh between them, the young officer being plucked clean off his feet time after time, in spite of the gigantic strides that he was taking. But the pace at which they were going soon took them clear of the pursuing Zulus, and a few minutes later they again got a sight of the camp.

There in front of them stood the remnant of the British force, not more than two hundred men all told, now formed up in a hollow square as they ought to have been at first. Hugh's two guns had been captured long ago, but as the Zulus did not know how to handle cannon they were not of any use to them. The whole

field presented a most dreadful spectacle, for the dead lay in heaps all over the ground—great mounds of black men were to be seen, intermingled with scarlet-jacketed forms, lying just as they had fallen in their tracks ; but the most horrifying part of it all was that every white man had been disembowelled, according to the custom of the Zulus with their enemies ! There was not a single fallen white man alive on all that hideous field !

Hugh had, however, little time for thought, for the next moment the square was reached and the handful of Zululand Mounted Rifles rode into its shelter, to the accompaniment of wild cheers from the men who had witnessed the gallant charge ; and as there were no longer sufficient horses to allow of another charge being made, the few animals still remaining were placed in the centre of the square, while their riders stationed themselves in the ranks, armed only with their sabres ; but they had resolved with one accord that when the Zulus came to close quarters, as they would in a few short minutes, they would not die until they had sent a goodly number of the enemy to the Shades before them.

Ten seconds later the Zulus had closed in to within fifty yards of the doomed band, and a rattling volley flashed out from three sides of the square as the savages gathered themselves together for the last decisive rush ; the final phase of this never-to-be-forgotten battle had commenced ; and a quarter of an hour now would see the end. The volley, fired at close range as it was, did awful execution, every bullet finding its billet twice or thrice over ; but the savages continued to sweep forward absolutely unchecked, and the next moment spear-blade rasped upon rifle-barrel as the

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British soldiers thrust and stabbed in a supreme effort to keep the square unbroken. Hugh himself, posted at one corner of the square, wielded his sabre with such tremendous effect that he soon had a heap of dead before him as high as his waist ; but with the front and sides of the square matters were faring much worse. It is an established fact that the British troops are the bravest and most steady in the world—but unfortunately there were many volunteers in the ranks who had never before seen a shot fired in anger ; and although the regulars stood steady as a rock before the Zulu charges, some of the newly enlisted troops soon began to exhibit signs of a disposition to give way. Rifles had been emptied long since, there was no time to re-load, and bayonet and sword were now the only weapons remaining to keep the savage hordes at bay ; and although they were used with the courage and energy of despair, than which there is none more deadly, the ranks were becoming thinned with appalling rapidity, as well by the showers of assegais thrown at long range by the rearmost ranks of the enemy as by the terrible *iwwas* used in the hand-to-hand fighting.

It could not possibly last much longer, and the end came when one young Carbineer shrieked aloud as he received a hideous wound from a stabbing assegai. That shriek seemed completely to shatter the nerve of some of the younger men, and for a moment they wavered and shrank from the encounter ; the next—the Zulus dashed in in overwhelming numbers and—the end had come !

Yes, all was over at last, for the square was broken and the battle, no longer a fight against tremendous odds, at once became an awful, harrowing, nightmare massacre ! Vainly the men strove to re-form ; it

was impossible, for they were now broken up into little isolated groups which were being attacked on all sides at once. Colonels Durnford and Pulleine were long since dead, and Hugh was almost the only commissioned officer left alive. With the breaking of the square Lieutenants Melville and Coghill ripped the colours from the staves, and seizing a couple of horses, made a gallant effort to get away with them; but they were soon overtaken and killed at what is now known as the Fugitives' Drift, although the Zulus did not discover the colours which Melville had wrapped round his body, or if they discovered them, did not attach enough value to them to carry them away.

It now became a case of *saue qui pent*; and reluctant as Marchmont was to leave the field, he saw that there was no longer any hope of escape except by instant flight; therefore, seeing a horse standing at his elbow, he leaped into the saddle, and still hewing right and left with his sabre, managed by a miracle of good fortune to cleave a way through the Zulus and get clear of the encircling host, now ravening like famished wolves at the scent of blood. But a Zulu can run as fast as a cantering horse, provided that the ground be rough, and a body of *insizwa* (young men), burning to distinguish themselves, started in pursuit of the officer. Hugh, however, did not attempt to distance them at once, being unwilling to tax his horse too much at the outset, he therefore merely maintained a distance of a hundred yards or so ahead, trusting to the ability of the animal to tire the Zulus out.

But he had scarcely gone half a mile before he heard a piteous cry for help coming from a spot just in front of him, and looking carefully about, he saw a wounded

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man of the 24th crouching behind a clump of reeds. It was not to be thought of that he should leave the man to his fate, and in a second Hugh had leaped from his horse, lifted the man across the saddle, and himself sprung up behind him, now urging the horse to its best speed.

But the poor brute, already greatly exhausted, had more than it could well do to carry two men, and the Zulus were rapidly gaining when Marchmont suddenly remembered that he had a revolver in his tunic pocket. That revolver was the saving of them both, for quickly loading the weapon and turning in his saddle, he managed to drop three of the pursuing Zulus, whereupon the others gave up the chase, preferring to return and loot the camp before all the booty was appropriated.

Early the next morning Hugh rode into the little post of Rorke's Drift, still carrying the wounded soldier before him, and gave the officer in command the first intelligence of the frightful disaster which had just overtaken the British. Despite the consternation created by such terrible news, preparations were at once begun for the defence of the post, while Hugh, utterly overcome with exhaustion, flung himself down where he was, too deadly tired even to accept the refreshment which his brother officers pressed upon him. Under the sparse shadow of a heap of mealie bags he lay down, and at once sank into a state of insensibility, in which he was visited by fearful visions of whirling assegais, showers of blood, agonised faces, and fearfully mutilated corpses, while over all hung a panorama of the whole stricken field as he had glimpsed it at the instant of riding away, with its heaps of slain, ay, and even a few desperately wounded men who had

somehow been temporarily overlooked by the Zulus, and over whom, even now, the vultures would be beginning to hover. The like dreadful scenes were now, in all probability, being enacted under the silent stars !

CHAPTER VII

RORKE'S DRIFT

THE news which Hugh had brought of the appalling catastrophe at Isandhlwana produced an effect of almost paralysing dismay upon the little garrison at Rorke's Drift, for everyone had confidently expected that victory for the British would be the result of battle, and not a single man among the defenders of the post doubted that the weary horseman, spurring his jaded horse along the flats on the opposite side of the river, though he was carrying a wounded man, was bringing tidings of a defeat of the Zulus. When therefore, instead of victory, an overwhelming disaster was announced, everybody lost his head for a few brief minutes, for it was naturally expected that the conquering hordes would now press forward, sweep down upon and capture Rorke's Drift, which was the only fortified post between them and Natal, and overwhelm that colony before any further troops could be brought up from the south to prevent them. In the first moment of panic and confusion nobody thought of anything but instant flight, for there were but a hundred and forty Europeans present, thirty-five of whom were in the hospital; and how could a mere handful of men like that hope to oppose a Zulu army of twenty thousand, every man of which was flushed with victory? Directly the news became known, the Native Contingent

deserted in a body, still lessening the number of the defenders, but Lieutenant Chard of the Royal Engineers, who was in charge of the post, and Lieutenant Bromhead of the 24th, his colleague, were only voicing the opinion of every soldier present when they said that the desertion of a lot of black cravens, such as their native auxiliaries had proved themselves to be, was an advantage rather than otherwise to the remainder of the force.

The panic lasted but a few minutes and then, under the cheery, optimistic influence of Chard and Bromhead, every man recovered confidence in himself and his officers, and within fifteen minutes after Marchmont's arrival it had been determined to defend the post to the last gasp, rather than abandon it and so leave the road to Natal open to the conquering hordes. The first thing done then was to pick up Hugh, who remained insensible where he had flung himself down, and carry him to the hospital, where in a small iron-roofed, mud-walled building, over thirty other unfortunates lay, suffering from wounds and fever. The next and most important step was immediately to dispatch a mounted man to the nearest place where troops were to be found, to ask for assistance to be sent to Rorke's Drift without delay. Fully twenty men answered Lieutenant Chard's call for volunteers for this dangerous service, but of course all could not go, and it was finally decided to send one mounted man away at once to Helpmakaar ; while, lest any disaster should overtake him, another was to be dispatched half an hour after the first had left. Two horses were brought out and the first messenger mounted and spurred away into the hot morning haze, carrying the appeal for help, and sped on his way by hearty cheers, and many a fervent prayer for the success of his mission.

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It was impossible to guess at what time the Zulus would arrive, for if they had pushed on at once from Isandhlwana, they might be expected to put in at appearance at any moment, and everybody realised that should they appear while the place was in its original defenceless condition—well, every soul of the little garrison must be promptly wiped out !

The post itself consisted merely of a couple of iron-roofed, mud-walled huts, one of which had been converted into an impromptu hospital, while the other served as a storehouse. True, there were one or two other small buildings, but as they were only made of what is known as "wattle-and-daub," and had thatched roofs, they would be of practically no use whatever for purposes of shelter or defence. It was resolved that the place, such as it was, should be fortified, and that immediately, but the question at once arose : Where was the defensive material to come from ? Rorke's Drift was surrounded by stones and boulders for hundreds of yards in every direction ; but the stones were too small to be of much use, while the boulders, on the other hand, were so large that it would require much time and many hands to lift them. To build a stone wall, therefore, was quite out of the question.

Poor Lieutenant Chard was at his wit's end what to do, for the hospital was much too small to accommodate both the wounded and the rest of the garrison, even if such a plan had been deemed desirable, while the storehouse was only the same size as the hospital and was filled with provisions of various kinds. At this crisis a brilliant idea occurred to Bromhead and he at once communicated it to his brother-officer.

"I say, Chard," he remarked quietly, "that storehouse is full of bags of mealie and tins of biscuits.

Why not have them out, and endeavour to build up some sort of a defence with them ? ”

“By Jove ! Bromhead,” replied Chard, “that is a good scheme of yours, and it may be the means of saving us all. Sergeant,” he called to one of the non-commissioned officers, “bring every available man to the storehouse immediately, and set about getting all its contents into the open. See that the men do not dawdle, for if we cannot construct a rampart of some sort before the Zulus turn up, we shall be wiped out. You, Williams, and you, Trevanion,” he continued, speaking to a couple of privates who had just doubled up in response to the sergeant’s orders, “climb up on to the hospital roof—you will get a good view of the country from there—and let us know directly you catch sight of the Zulu advance guard ; also report suspicious appearance of any kind immediately.”

In a moment Williams and his companion provided themselves with a couple of pairs of binoculars and climbed up on to the roof of the hospital, upon which they forthwith established themselves, sitting astride of the ridge and anxiously scanning the neighbourhood with their glasses. Meanwhile the remaining men were working like demons to get everything out of the storehouse, and when a good-sized pile of cases and bags had been placed on the ground outside, Chard divided the men into two parties ; detailing one of them to construct a rampart of mealie-bags surmounted with biscuit-boxes and preserved meat tins, between the hospital and the storehouse, turning the space thus formed into a kind of courtyard, while the second party still continued at the back-breaking work of getting the remainder of the stores out of the shed.

In a remarkably short time the results of everybody’s

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strenuous labours began to be apparent; between the corners of the two principal sheds a breastwork of mealie-bags about three feet high had already been constructed, loopholes having been left for the rifle-barrels; and as this rampart gradually crept higher and higher—while there was still no sign of the Zulus—everybody's hopes began to revive, and the men began to think that after all the coming fight might be not quite so one-sided as they had at first feared it would be. Loopholes were cut in the walls of both hospital and store, the few waggons that the garrison possessed were brought inside the barricade and placed where they would be of most use for purposes of defence, and eventually the breastwork was raised to a height of four feet, by which time, however, the sacks were exhausted. It was then seen that the rampart enclosed a piece of ground which was rather too big for effective defence by the handful of men inside, and with feverish haste a barricade of biscuit-tins and preserved meat cases was built up inside the outer rampart of mealie sacks.

At length the defences were as complete as it was in the power of the garrison to make them, for every single can, tin, bag, or box which could possibly be utilised had by this time been placed in position, and the perspiring men wiped their dripping brows and again took up the rifles which they had laid aside during the work. Yet still there was no sign of the Zulus, and the tension of waiting, now that there was no more work to do, soon began to get on the men's nerves; the order was therefore given that a meal should be served out, since it was impossible to tell when there might be opportunity for another, and in spite of the fact that every soldier there knew that in all probability it would

be his last, everybody ate heartily and felt all the better for the food.

It was now about four o'clock in the afternoon and the defences had been completed for some time, yet still the smiling country revealed no sign or trace of the enemy, and men began to hope that the Zulus had been overtaken, brought to bay, and defeated by Lord Chelmsford with General Glyn and the main body. But alas! they were to be speedily undeceived, for half an hour later the weary garrison was galvanized into life by the cry from the sentinels on the hospital roof: "Here they come—here they come; thousands upon thousands of 'em!" and at the same moment the sentinels' alarm was proved genuine by the sudden outburst of the terrible Zulu war-chant, while the top of the low range of hills on the opposite side of the Buffalo river was seen to blacken with the swarming hordes, who were hurrying forward to annihilate the only body of white men who still barred their progress into Natal.

After Hugh had been placed on a bed in the hospital, his state of sensibility had gradually merged into that of sleep, and he had been for some hours sunk in a deep refreshing slumber when he was awakened by the shout of "Here they come!" immediately followed by the dreadful war-song which he had heard, such a few hours before, at Isandhlwana. In a moment he had sprung off the bed and rushed out of the hospital door, where he stood adjusting his sword-belt and slings, much to the amazement of the other men in the building who had naturally believed him to have been badly wounded. As he stood there watching the black stream of humanity pouring down the side of the hill, he perceived Lieutenant Chard hurrying past, and to him Marchmont

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reported himself as ready for duty. The Lieutenant took a hurried glance round the "compound"—as some of the soldiers had begun to call it—and then gave Hugh charge of the hospital, with instructions to take care that none of the enemy broke a way in through the flimsy mud walls of which the place was built. A dozen men were allowed him for the purpose of defence, and Marchmont took up his position inside the hospital, the rifles of his men protruding through the loop-holes which had already been cut in the walls.

Then ensued a nerve-racking period of suspense while the Zulus crossed the Buffalo river, and many a veteran soldier shivered and turned pale when at last the enemy appeared on the Natal side of the river, and came forward thousands strong like an enormous black wave. There were not quite so many as had first been supposed, although even as it was the English were outnumbered by nearly forty to one; but the attackers were all men of the famous Undi regiment—the very flower of the Zulu army—and there were four thousand of them opposed to one hundred white men! truly, men told one another, this was going to be a very battle of the gods, and death seemed to be very near to that handful of gallant souls.

At last the trying period of inaction was over and the tension was relaxed. With a booming shout that might have been heard for miles the Zulus broke into a run, and brandishing their assegais and knobkerries charged at top speed for the little fort, hoping to crush down the defenders by sheer weight of numbers and the impetuosity of their attack. But this time they were reckoning without their hosts. At Isandhlwana the British were in the open without the smallest particle of cover, here they had an intrenchment of a sort, and

as the Zulus swept up to within one hundred yards of the barricade, five score rifles cracked at them in a volley, and the front ranks of the enemy—ay, and not a few of those immediately behind them also—went down like corn before the sweep of the sickle. The black mass checked, swayed, and for a moment almost came to a halt, but the front ranks were pushed forward by those behind; and after a momentary suggestion of hesitation the whole army leaped at the ramparts again, flinging assegais in such numbers that the ground of the little compound was in an instant covered with them, while many a brave fellow fell under that deadly hail, never to rise again. But that moment of hesitancy had afforded the defenders time to re-load their rifles, and as the Zulus surged forward afresh they were met by a withering cross-fire from both hospital and store-house. The tornado of lead swept through the densely-packed mass with devastating effect, and for a brief minute or two the enemy were completely demoralized. The ground was cumbered with dead and dying Zulus lying in heaps, and over those ghastly piles of bleeding, writhing bodies the remainder stumbled, being pushed forward by their more eager brethren in the rear.

Thrust forward thus, striving vainly to find some way of escape from that deadly hail of lead and being unable to retreat, the foremost savages in their desperation turned their assegais on those immediately behind them, and for a few minutes strove to fight their way back and get beyond the range of those death-dealing rifles whose muzzles seemed to follow their every movement. But at the critical moment when it seemed as though by a miracle the Zulu army had become panic-stricken, a gigantic savage pushed his way irresistibly through to the front, and with uplifted arms and deep,

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sonorous voice, sought to quell the panic among the demoralized men. That he was a chief of considerable power and importance was quite evident, both from the magnificence of his accoutrements and the trappings of his war-dress ; and when he began to shout certain commands in tones of withering scorn, the English at once saw that the Zulus feared him even more than they did the bullets of the whites.

"Shoot that man !" suddenly roared Lieutenant Chard, who came pressing forward from another part of the compound ; "shoot him quickly, he is the *induna* Dabulamanzi. If we can kill *him* the battle will be more than half won ! "

A score of rifles immediately flashed, but although nearly every man in the neighbourhood of the *induna* fell, Dabulamanzi himself apparently remained unhurt, and his great bass voice continued to ring out without the slightest tremor.

The effect of the man's harangue was at once apparent, for the Zulus ceased fighting among themselves and swung round facing the fort, prepared to make another mighty effort to storm it. About half their number had already made their way round to the other side of the enclosure, and this time the assault was delivered on all sides at the same moment. Like a legion of black demons they came leaping at the breastwork, shouting and whistling, and it seemed as if no power on earth could possibly stop them. Dabulamanzi, in the foremost of the battle, seemed to be both invulnerable and ubiquitous ; he appeared to possess the power of being everywhere at once, and wherever he was to be found there the fight raged hottest, and the little court-yard was speedily converted into an inferno of fire, smoke, raining lead, and flying assegais.

Some of the blacks, bolder than the rest, actually seized the hot rifle-barrels which protruded through the loop-holes, and strove to wrench them from the soldiers' grasp, although their hands must have been severely burnt in the process, for the metal part of the weapons had become nearly red-hot through the frequency with which they had been fired. And so determined were they that even after being shot through the body with the rifle, the barrel of which he was holding, the Zulu would still retain his grip upon the weapon ; so that, even after the life had gone out of the man, it was a difficult matter for the soldier to wrench his rifle out of the dead hands. But in the face of such a deadly fire as the British maintained, even Zulu flesh and blood was finally compelled to recoil ; and suddenly at first, but with ever increasing celerity, the black warriors drew away from the ramparts and retired out of rifle shot, while those who were wounded crawled away into the long grass, or painfully dragged themselves behind sheltering boulders. When the smoke had cleared away from the fort it was seen that quite a hundred savages lay either dead or wounded *inside the rampart*, showing how narrowly the defenders had escaped being overwhelmed.

But if the British flattered themselves that the Zulus were beaten and had finally retired from the conflict, they were woefully mistaken ; for after retreating about a mile from the fort they halted, and it soon became evident that the *indunas* were busily engaged in holding a council of war.

"What on earth are those fellows doing now ?" suddenly exclaimed Bromhead, pointing with his finger to a number of savages who had separated from the main body and were apparently engaged in pulling

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up the long grass which grew plentifully among the boulders ; and in a moment half a dozen pairs of binoculars and all the eyes of the garrison were turned upon the men who were acting in such a curious manner, but nobody seemed able to determine the enemy's purpose.

"Surely the beggars don't intend to gather reeds and build huts in order to settle down to a regular siege of the place ?" suggested Lieutenant Chard, turning to his colleague, " But I'll be shot if they aren't pulling up reeds, and in large quantities, too," he continued. " I wonder what on earth those fellows think they are doing ? "

The little band of heroes were not to be long left in doubt, for the savages soon desisted from the occupation which had aroused the curiosity of the garrison ; also it presently became only too evident that they had no intention whatever of abandoning the attack, for presently the giant *induna* Dabulamanzi was seen to rise from the council circle and walk round it, waving his arms excitedly and evidently haranguing the assembled warriors. Presently he ceased, and as he did so a tremendous shout burst from the Zulus ; they rose to their feet, formed up at once into squadrons, and yelling their terrible war-cry rushed forward with even more impetuosity than before to the attack.

"Here they come !" shouted the soldiers, for the second time on that memorable day ; and as the Zulus dashed forward toward the barricades the rifles again snarled defiance and death at the enemy, whose front ranks again went down like corn under the sickle before that withering fire. But Dabulamanzi was now leading them on to the attack, and it truly seemed as though the *induna* bore a charmed life, for although Chard and

Bromhead called upon their men to shoot the chief, and even took pot-shots at him themselves ; and although dozens of rifles were discharged at him at point blank range, his tall form still towered erect above his fellows, and his voice was constantly heard urging them on to still greater efforts.

The next moment before more than half the men had found time to re-load, the Zulus had reached the rampart—which they had now evidently resolved to storm at all hazards—and a most desperate hand-to-hand struggle at once ensued. A few hurried shots, and every rifle was empty ; and as there was now neither time nor opportunity to re-load, it at once became a fight of steel against steel, of bayonet against assegai, which was waged in comparative silence, save only for the low-muttered imprecations of the British and the fierce whistlings of the savages as they drove their weapons home, mingled horribly with the groans of men in agony, and the occasional short, sharp words of command from the officers. Hugh, in the hospital, had been waiting for another attack to be made on the building, but a quick survey of the state of affairs outside soon revealed to him that the Zulus were turning all their attention to other parts of the fort, and he at once saw that he and his men with their loaded rifles would prove a very welcome reinforcement to his hard-pressed comrades in the compound.

He therefore issued a few hurried commands, and fixing their bayonets the little band dashed out of the hospital, making direct for the place where the Zulus seemed to be swarming thickest. Indeed, as it turned out, he and his party arrived in the very nick of time, for just at that point the defenders were being slowly but surely driven back and overwhelmed by the

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swarming Zulus. A quick, well-aimed volley, followed by an impetuous charge with fixed bayonets, however, drove the Zulus once more from the barricade and gave the sorely harassed and exhausted men an opportunity to rest for a few seconds and re-load their rifles. Hugh had turned round to see where else he might use his men to the greatest advantage, and as he turned he saw a sight which made his blood turn cold. Darkness was already settling down with the suddenness which is characteristic of that part of the world, and he was just in time to see, against the black clouds of the night, a shower of missiles fly flaming through the air and fall upon the thatched roofs of several of the huts which stood in the "compound," instantly setting them on fire.

Then everybody knew why the enemy had been gathering grass and reeds. The Zulus had saturated the dry stuff with fat, and attaching it to assegais had set it on fire, immediately afterward flinging it on all the roofs which were thatched, and in a moment those roofs became a crackling mass of flame. It was not, however, the mere fact of the huts being set on fire that made men tremble and turn pale, it was because the hospital was almost surrounded by those huts, and unless the flames could be put out, or the wounded extricated quickly from the building, *all the helpless men would inevitably be burnt alive.*

Without hesitating a moment Hugh called to his men and dashed at a run for the hospital, immediately upon entering which he heard a thunderous knocking noise and knew that the Zulus had turned their attention to this building and were attempting to break down the mud walls and so effect an entrance that way. Without a moment's hesitation he hastily divided his

men into two parties, telling off one section to carry the wounded into the storehouse, while the others thrust their rifles through the loopholes and fired into the swarming savages in an attempt to beat them off. But it was of no use, as fast as one man fell another took his place, and the battering at the walls continued with the result that at the end of a few minutes the mud walls began to crack, then to bend inward, and a second or two later a large hole was driven in the side of the hospital through which the enemy dashed, thrusting and stabbing with their assegais, each man striving to be the first to commence the butchery of the wounded men lying on the beds.

Then began the most heroic and desperate struggle of the whole defence of Rorke's Drift. The soldiers who were carrying away the helpless, handed their rifles to such of the wounded as could use them, and calmly continued their work of rescue, while Hugh and his remaining half a dozen men, together with the sick who were able to assist in any way, devoted themselves to the attempt to prevent the hole in the wall being made larger, and to keep out the Zulus who were attempting to force their way in through it. Ranged round the gap, the heroic men hurled back the natives with bayonet, fist, and clubbed rifle, actually checking the rush for several minutes by their undaunted bearing and almost superhuman courage and exertions.

At the first assault a few of the wounded had been assegaid where they lay, but such had been the efforts of the rescuers that in a few minutes those of the enemy who had forced their way into the building had been slain to a man, while now the hospital was almost cleared, and there remained only the handful of invalids who were helping in the defence, and the second

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section of Hugh's party, three of whom had been stabbed to death a few seconds previously.

Hugh saw that it would be impossible to keep the Zulus at bay much longer, and he therefore sent word to Lieutenant Chard to that effect so that a general retreat to the storehouse might be made; for when once the gap was abandoned there was nothing to stop the enemy from pouring into the compound. A few minutes later the gallant young officer saw that the men outside were slowly retiring on the only building available, and he thereupon sent away the remaining wounded striving to keep the Zulus out with the assistance of the three men left him.

At last the bugle sounded, and with a word to the men with him Hugh turned and dashed for the storehouse at full speed, bringing up the rear, his party retiring and closing the door behind them just as the foremost Zulu rushed, baffled, up to it. The storehouse had already been loop-holed, and as the soldiers had at length obtained a brief breathing space they were able to reload and fire upon the enemy, who had now gained possession of every part of Rorke's Drift except the building in which the British had taken up their last stand. Lucky it was for this brave band that the storehouse was strongly built, and roofed with iron, for had there been anything combustible about it they would have been burnt out within a quarter of an hour!

Darkness had now for some time prevailed over the scene, but the Zulus showed no signs of abandoning the attack; on the contrary, as the time went on their efforts to storm the place became, if anything, still fiercer and more determined, and the unequal struggle continued hour after hour through the long watches of the night. Toward midnight the whisper went

round that the ammunition was running short, and the men told one another that unless help arrived quickly the end was very near; yet for all that, there was no diminution in their steadfast courage, or in their indomitable efforts to keep the old flag flying. The murky darkness was lit up by intermittent flashes of flame from the rifles and flying masses of burning grass with which the enemy vainly tried to set fire to the building; and in this fashion from hour to hour the inferno raged, the English hoping against hope that any moment might now bring to their ears the welcome sound of firing and the inspiring cheers which would herald the approach of the relieving force.

Toward three o'clock, however, it seemed to the defenders that the Zulu attack was slackening, and in half an hour it ceased altogether. Men looked incredulously into one another's faces asking whether the enemy had indeed drawn off or whether this was only some fresh ruse on their part, but nobody could as yet answer that question definitely. And so they lay *perdu* until, an hour later, the first faint streak of dawn appeared in the sky, the gathering light revealing the haggard white faces, the torn, blood-stained clothes of the soldiers, and the many other evidences, which cannot be written here, of the awful ordeal through which the heroes had passed in order to prevent the invasion of Natal, and to enrol their names for ever upon the record of gallant deeds well done by the defenders of our Empire.

With the coming of the light men stole cautiously forth by twos and threes, expecting every moment to be pounced upon by the ambushed enemy; but a long and close scrutiny of the surrounding country encouraged the belief that the Zulus had indeed retired,

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and the defenders began to breathe a little more freely. Yet that they should have altogether escaped at the last moment as it were, and by the skin of their teeth, seemed too wonderful to be true ; and no one would have been in the least surprised to see the Zulus return in increased numbers at any moment. Then suddenly a sergeant of the 24th groaned ; " God help us ! here they are again ! "

By Heaven's mercy, however, he was mistaken. The dust clouds which had evoked his despairing ejaculation were caused by the arrival of the relief force sent for on the previous night to Helpmakaar ; and the weary, haggard-eyed, blood-stained garrison streamed out to welcome squadron after squadron of mounted infantry as the relieving force rode up at a gallop. Men clasped hands with men as though they had never expected to meet again in this world, as was indeed the literal truth ; and many a burly soldier, overcome at last by the terrific strain of the ordeal through which he had passed, dropped his head upon his hands and wept like a child. Hugh, smarting with more or less severe wounds all over him, sought out all the officers he could find, anxious to know how affairs were going to the south of them, for he trembled for the safety of his brother ; but no one knew anything, although all seemed to be of the opinion that the conquering hordes could not yet have gone beyond the Tugela.

While the new arrivals were talking with the garrison a signaller reported the approach of a still further British force, and half an hour later Lord Chelmsford arrived at the head of the main body, overjoyed to find that Rorke's Drift had not been made like unto Isandhlwana. It was then learned that several disasters

had overtaken the British in different parts of the country, and as urgent messages had been sent to England for more troops, it was determined to evacuate Zululand until such time as the reinforcements should arrive. The force at Rorke's Drift was therefore ordered to make for Helpmakaar, where it was to remain for the present ; and only too thankful for the respite after all that they had gone through, the weary troops gladly began their march out of the land where they had met with so many dreadful misfortunes and reverses, and where the Angel of Death had been so busy among them.

CHAPTER VIII

“ AN ENEMY HATH DONE THIS ”

HELPMAKAAR being only a day's march from Rorke's Drift, the exhausted troops arrived at that haven of rest upon the evening of the day the morning of which had seen them standing upon the crumbling verge of another ghastly tragedy ; and having been informed by the Commander-in-Chief that it was not probable that they would be again required to take the field until the reinforcements had arrived from England, a good many of them asked for and obtained sufficient leave to enable them to visit their families. Colonel Pearson's force at Eshowe was a sufficient barrier to prevent the Zulus from entering Natal in that quarter, while Colonels Wood and Buller patrolled the border with squadrons of mounted men to keep the enemy from crossing the Tugela at any of its fords. But the Europeans were, for the time being, utterly unable to resume the offensive against the natives ; all that they could possibly do was to prevent them from entering Natal and devastating that fair land ; and the subsequent excitement and apprehension among the inhabitants of the “ Garden Colony ” became intense, for one could never be quite certain that a Zulu *impi* or two might not contrive to evade the watchers on the border, cross the Tugela at some unsuspected ford and sweep through the smiling land, carrying destruction and death with them before

they could be brought to action. Fortified posts were hastily erected along both sides of the Tugela ; a border-guard of civilians was formed, in addition to the military force already there ; and the families in all the outlying districts went into *laager*, when it happened that they were unable to leave their estates and go into the towns ; every town and village threw up earthworks, barricaded the houses, and put itself generally into the best possible state of defence against the invasion which everybody feared was inevitable. Even in Pietermaritzburg itself a *laager* was formed shutting in all that part of the city lying between the Commercial Road and Timber Street and between Longmarket Street and Pietermaritzburg Street ; the area thus enclosed being capable of accommodating four thousand people ; while all windows of buildings were shuttered and loop-holed, and open spaces and plots of waste ground were barricaded. The condition of suspense and terror prevalent in the capital of Natal has seldom been equalled, for the inhabitants, being Colonials, were for the most part well acquainted with the Zulu and his ways ; and they realized with painful vividness the horrors that would be perpetrated should the enemy ever gain access to the practically defenceless town. On the Sunday following the battle of Isandhlwana all places of worship were thronged with people offering up prayers for the preservation of the country, while the churches in which the citizens worshipped were draped with black. The usual quiet of the Sabbath was rudely broken by the sound of knocking and hammering made by the workmen who were erecting defences, and by the rumble of waggons conveying arms and ammunition to the Court House ; while everybody listened with strained ears and throbbing

pulses for the sound of three guns, fired one after the other, from Fort Napier, which was to be the signal that the Zulus were advancing and that the townspeople were to go into *laager* forthwith.

Poor Hugh's state of mind at this crisis may be more easily imagined than described, for he had received no news of Jack's arrival at Greytown; and even were he there, his brother could not feel that he was safe; for the little village was close to the border, and stood right in the track which an invading army of Zulus might well be expected to take. Apart from this, however, he was beginning to be seriously alarmed at the circumstance that he had as yet received no communication of any kind from the party; nor had Soye, his own faithful and devoted servant, who he had sent with them, yet put in an appearance, although the Kafir had already had plenty of time in which to find and join his master, even if the O'More's cavalcade had been unexpectedly detained on the way to Greytown. It was now exactly a month since Jack had left "Moyeni" for Greytown, and the journey need have occupied only a week at the most, with decent luck. Soye, bearing the longed-for letter, would do the return journey much quicker than the outward, and should have got back to "Moyeni" about ten days after leaving it. Allowing another four days for the man to discover Hugh's whereabouts and to join his master—an ample amount of time—Soye was exactly a fortnight overdue! True, Hugh had been flitting about from one place to another without stopping long in any one spot, but the Kafir would be sure to find plenty of people who could tell him to which part of the country the Zululand Mounted Rifles had been ordered. No; even allowing a wide margin

for delays, Marchmont felt that something very much out of the ordinary must have happened to detain the servant; and he could only hope that the “something” had not involved Jack in danger or hurt.

The young Englishman was sitting, nine days after his arrival at Helpmakaar, nursing his wounds in a canvas chair in front of the little iron shanty which had been assigned to him as his “quarters,” when he thought that he heard some man’s voice, in the distance, calling his name. In a moment he was on his feet, and listening intently, for, if it were really he who was being called for, it could only mean that his trusty messenger had at last arrived, bearing news from Jack. For a second he feared that he must have been mistaken, and then he heard the voice again, this time calling unmistakably: “Marchmont, Marchmont, are you anywhere about, man? Hi! has anybody seen Captain Marchmont? There’s a Kafir here who says that he’s the captain’s servant and has important news for him.”

Hugh did not wait to hear whether anybody replied, but, lifting up his voice, he called out with the full power of his lungs: “Hillo! hillo! here I am. Bring the man this way; I am expecting a messenger.” And a few seconds later one of his fellow officers strolled round the corner of the bungalow accompanied by a native whom Hugh immediately recognised as Soye.

“Here’s the fellow, Marchmont,” said the red-coated officer. “He says he belongs to you; so I suppose it’s all right, eh?”

“Yes, it’s quite right, thanks,” replied Marchmont; and the officer strolled lazily away to find a shady corner in which he could obtain refuge from the blazing sunshine. As soon as he had disappeared from sight

Soye ran forward to his master, and standing upright before him, gave the salute of "*Baba! Inkosi!*" (Father! Chief!). Hugh returned the salute mechanically with a terrible chill of fear gripping at his heart, for he seemed to know instinctively, by the look of the man, that he was the bearer of evil tidings. Waiting, therefore, until he could steady his voice, Hugh said coldly: "You have been a very long time, Soye, in carrying out the work I gave you to do; what is the reason? I expected you here at least fourteen days ago." And the young man braced himself up to hear what the Kafir had to say.

"Ah, chief," exclaimed the man, in his deep, rolling voice, "I have bad news for you and it has not been my fault that I am so long overdue; I came to my master as soon as I could. But I have been a prisoner, away over there, *Inkosi*"—pointing to the north—"and a thing so dreadful has happened that I shrink from telling you the tale, O great chief!"

"Go on man, go on with your story," exclaimed Marchmont, hoarsely, scarcely able in his impatience to restrain himself from gripping the native by the neck and shaking him; "go on, for heaven's sake. But don't tell me that any harm has come to the *umfaan*."

"Ay, *Baas*, but it is about the *umfaan* (boy) that I have to tell you," answered Soye, sadly; "but do not look at me like that, oh my master, it was not my fault—and he is not dead. Nay, it may be that if we go at once in search of him we may find him and bring him back before it is too late. But, *Inkos*: listen to me while I tell you the tale of what occurred; I can tell it in a very few words and when you have heard what I have to tell you, you will be the better able to decide what to do."

“Then go on, man, for pity’s sake ! ” exhorted Hugh, harshly, sinking back into his chair with the air of a man stricken by a sudden sickness, “ go on, and let me know the worst, at once.”

“Well then, ‘*Nkos*,’ began Soye, “ we started with the two waggons, directly after you and the *amasoja* (soldiers) had passed the house ; as *Baas* Mafuta (James O’More’s Kafir name) said he did not wish to delay his departure any longer than was necessary ; indeed we should have set out before, only that the *umfaan* begged to be allowed to see you pass, and really we were only just ready when the troops came in sight. The *Umfaan* and Missie O’More rode inside the first waggon which was driven by me, while one of the native police acted as *voerlooper*. *Baas* Mafuta rode his horse alongside the waggon ; and the other policeman drove the second waggon, Nada acting as *voerlooper* to that, since we could find no other servants. We travelled about fifteen miles that first day before it was time to ‘out-span,’ and we camped for the night at a place where the Tugela forks into two parts—you will remember the place, ‘*Nkos* ? we have often hunted round about there.”

Hugh nodded and told the man to continue.

“*Baas* Mafuta kept guard during the first half of the night, ‘*Nkos*,’ resumed Soye, “ and I watched during the second part, but no living thing came near the encampment ; the only thing we heard being the roaring of some lions which had come down to drink, and which had probably scented the oxen. Next morning we inspanned and started at daybreak, in order to get as far as we could on our road before the sun became too hot ; and we hoped to be able to sleep in the village of Stembi that night. But, unfortunately,

we lost a waggon-wheel while crossing the dry bed of a stream ; and as it took us four hours to replace it, the *Baas* soon saw that we should have to camp out on the *veldt* a second time ; and sure enough, darkness came upon us while we were still ten miles from Stembé. We therefore out-spanned and went into camp again ; and this time it was I who kept the first watch, while Mafuta was to keep the other. The young master had been asleep some time, *Baas*, and I was standing leaning on the rifle that Mafuta had lent me, thinking of my home under the Drakensberg Mountains, when he awoke and putting his head out of the tent cover, asked me if I were still awake. Of course I told him I was, and I also said that he need not feel anxious, because there was no longer any danger from the Zulus and I would at once raise the alarm if I saw any wild animals prowling about the camp.

"He said, however, that he could not sleep ; and about a quarter of an hour later he crept out of the waggon, slid down to the ground and came over to talk to me. He seemed perfectly well, but said that his head was hot, and he felt lonely because Miss O'More was asleep. He promised that if I would allow him to stay with me he would go back to bed as soon as he felt sleepy.

"So Jack stayed ; and we had been chatting together for about twenty minutes when there arose a fearful yell from the bushes among which we were encamped, and a party of about twenty Amazulu dashed out of their ambush, and made for the waggons. The *umfaan* and I were at that moment in the shadow of a bush, so the Amazulu did not at first see us, but rushed straight to the waggon where *Baas* Mafuta was sleeping. Two of them jumped inside, and a moment later I

heard the death scream of a man. I then knew that the *Baas* was dead. But a curious thing now happened, *Inkos*, for as though the scream were a signal, a *white man*, with a mask over his face, dashed into the open and galloping up to the waggon, spoke angrily in the Zulu tongue to the men, asking whether they had slain the boy. They answered that they had not yet found him and at once went away toward the second waggon, while the white man—who must have been the leader of the Zulus—immediately began to hunt about, calling the *umfaan*.

“When the savages rushed at the waggons I had pulled Jack down beside me behind a bush in the hope that we might escape unnoticed ; but the white man soon found us and although I tried to defend the young master, the man was stronger than I, and he cut me down with his *sjambok*, giving me the scar which you see here, across my forehead. Just as I was falling and a moment before my senses left me, I heard the *umfaan* shriek out, calling your name ; and I saw the *'mlungu* (white man) seize him in his arms and throw him across the saddle in front of him, laughing all the while and saying some words that I could not understand.

“When I recovered consciousness, *'Nkos*, I found I was lying bound in the bottom of the waggon, which was evidently on the move, for I could feel it bumping along the road, while *Baas* Jack was sitting beside me, watching my face ; and I could see that he was crying. I asked him what had happened after I had been knocked down, and he told me that he had been bound and placed in the waggon where he now was, that they had flung me, all insensible, into the same waggon ; that the *Baas* Mafuta and the *Inkosixaan* had been killed at the first attack by the Zulus ; that Nada, the

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servant, was in the second waggon ; and that I had been lying unconscious nearly a day. As soon as I awoke he loosened my arms at my request, 'Nkos, although he seemed almost too much afraid to do so on account of the 'mlungu ; and I looked cautiously out of the waggon to see whether anyone was about. But they were not very close to us, so we were able to talk in safety ; and the young master told me that he believed it was not a Zulu raid at all, but the work of some white man ; and he said he was sure he knew the man's name, although he could not see his face because he wore a mask. But he was sure that the voice was that of a man who used to visit his uncle at the farm. He seemed terribly frightened, and said the man had told him he was taking him away because he hated his brother—you, 'Inkos. The poor little child was sobbing all the time he told me this, and I comforted him as well as I could while we tried to think of some way of escape. Many a plan we thought of and considered, but none were good enough to attempt ; for although our guard did not pay very much attention to me, the *umfaan* they were always watching ; and we finally decided that I must try to get away alone, and take the news to you as quickly as possible in order that you might attempt his rescue. But no chance of escape came to me for more than a week, 'Nkos, and every day that passed saw us carried farther and farther into Zululand. But at last, on a certain night, the white man went hunting, and the Zulus who guarded us at once seized the opportunity to get drunk on *tuyala* (Kafir beer). I waited until they were nearly all asleep, and then managed to slip out of the waggon and escape ; and before morning I was beyond pursuit.

"Now you will perhaps say, 'Nkos, that I ought to

have taken advantage of such a splendid opportunity, not only to have myself escaped but also to have carried off the *umfaan* with me. And indeed I not only thought of it but talked the matter over with the little one. But when we came to consider it, the difficulties seemed too great; for the *umfaan* is but a little one, of no great strength; and we concluded that, even though I should carry him part of the way, we could not possibly travel fast enough to elude the pursuit of the *'umlungu* and the swift-footed Amazulu. And to escape, only to be recaptured, would be worse than useless; for the *'mlungu* would take care that the *umfaan* should have no second chance to escape; while as for me, they would doubtless kill me; and who would there then be to tell you, *'Nkos*, what had become of the little one? Therefore, after very carefully considering the matter, we both agreed that it would be best for me to get away alone and make my way to you as quickly as possible. And behold, *'Nkos*, here I am.

“But as for Jack, he is not quite alone, for the *'mlungu* gave orders, several days before, that he was to have Nada to look after him. He himself never spoke to the boy, or to me; indeed he kept out of our sight as much as possible; and we never saw him without his mask; so I could not tell who he might really be, although the young master seemed to guess.

“Well *'Nkos*, I got safely away, and I have done the journey from the waggon to this place in three days. I know exactly where the waggon was when I left it, and I could find the place again, when it would of course be easy to follow the waggon-wheel tracks until we came up with it. I also have some idea where they are taking Jack, and I could lead you thither in about a week.

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That is all my tale ; I have done my best, 'Nkos, and I hope that you are not displeased with me."

Hugh had closely followed Soye's narrative, and by the time that it was concluded he had guessed exactly what had occurred. Manoel Salvaterra, at the head of a party of Zulus, had secured the person of Jack, as an act of revenge for Hugh's capture of him a month ago—as he had threatened to do ; and although Marchmont shuddered at the thought of the boy in the power of such a man, a spark of hope had again sprung up in his heart on hearing that the youngster was unharmed, up to the time when Soye made his escape ; therefore, if he started in pursuit at once they might still be in time to save his little brother from further harm. Hugh, forgetting all about his wounds, determined that he would get away immediately, by hook or by crook ; and, with the faithful Soye as guide, go in pursuit, and, if possible, would rescue Jack unharmed. But if he arrived too late—well, he promised himself that the vengeance which he would wreak upon the Portuguese should not be forgotten as long as men lived in Zululand.

"Displeased !" he answered at last, starting up from his chair, " why, no, Soye ; I am anything but that. You have given me hope again, boy ; for at first I feared that the poor child had been slain, perhaps tortured to death by the Zulus. Yes, we will go after the *umfaan* ; and you must prepare for a journey immediately. Get out my carbine and my revolver and I will endeavour to procure a gun for you also. Then get my horse ready and bring him round, while I go to obtain leave from the colonel. Hurry now, man ; there is no time to waste ! "

His strength returning to him with the revival

of hope, Marchmont sprang off the verandah and dashed at full speed to Colonel Glyn's quarters, being lucky enough to find his chief at home. To him he poured out his story, telling it in the fewest possible words, and ending with the request for leave, so that he might go in pursuit of the arch-villain and traitor, Manoel Salvaterra. The Colonel listened attentively, and when Hugh had finished, he remarked :

“Of course, to ask for leave when we are waiting for the next move in the game of war is a most unusual request ; but I know how intensely you must be suffering from anxiety on your young brother's account ; also your regiment has, unhappily, been annihilated in the disastrous affair of Isandhlwana ; consequently you are practically a free man. Therefore I will let you go ; especially as we are not likely to be called upon to move again until reinforcements arrive from England. But, let me tell you, Marchmont,” he went on, dropping his stiff, official tone, “ that I fear you will never return alive. From what you say I gather that you will have to penetrate right into the heart of the enemy's country ; and I fail to see how you can possibly avoid discovery ; while if they capture you—well ”—with a shrug—“ it is easy to guess what your end will be. But have you yet formed any plan of campaign, if I may so term it, in connection with this expedition of yours ? ”

Hugh was obliged to confess that, in the haste and anxiety of the moment, he had not.

“Aha !” returned the colonel, “ I thought as much. Now, young man, just listen to me for a few minutes, and take my advice. I won't keep you long, and you will find the time not ill spent. To begin with, there would, in my opinion, be absolutely no chance whatever of your succeeding in your quest if you were to go as you

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are, undisguised. I therefore suggest that you should adopt the dress and character of one of those Arab traders of whom there are so many at present in this country. They do a great deal of barter with the Zulus; therefore, although I suppose nobody but a Zulu is really safe in Zululand just now, you would, by assuming that or some other disguise, have much more chance of finding your brother, than by going openly as yourself. Take a few little trinkets with you as merchandise, and work your way through the country as an Arab; I believe this is your one and only chance. Now I must not keep you any longer, for I can see how eager you are to be off; but before you go, let me remind you that if by any chance you should return alive, you will be in a position to give the Commander-in-Chief a good deal of information about the Zulus and their country which will prove of immense value."

"I quite understand, sir," replied Hugh, smiling; "and I promise you that I will keep my eyes wide open. I will also adopt your suggestion with regard to the disguise. Well, good-bye, sir, and a thousand thanks for your kindness in giving me leave, which I shall try to have earned by the time that I get back."

"Good-bye, Marchmont," said the colonel, holding out his hand. "I hope you may prove successful. Good luck and the best of good wishes go with you."

In five minutes Hugh was back in his bungalow, where he found the faithful Soye ready and waiting. To him Marchmont imparted the new plan, which he was glad to see met with the Kafir's approval. Then he paid a visit to a Mohammedan store in the town, procured a complete Arab costume and a quantity of brown stain, together with a few nick-knacks for trading purposes, and returned to the bungalow, where

he carefully packed everything into a valise, intending to complete his transformation on the *veldt* instead of at Helpmakaar, where, for all he knew to the contrary, there might be plenty of spies ready to carry the word to the Zulus that a disguised white man was going into their country. All being now ready, Hugh mounted his horse—intending to turn the animal adrift as soon as its presence should be likely to become a danger ; with Soye carrying the valise, trotted away down the main street, passed the sentries to whom he showed the colonel's pass, and by the time that night fell, was far away from Helpmakaar, riding along under the stars. Marchmont was well started on the trail and it now behoved Manoel Salvaterra, had the worthy only known it, to beware !

CHAPTER IX

IN QUEST OF THE LOST

"SOYE my boy, are you *quite* sure that you have not mistaken the way?" demanded Hugh on the evening of the sixth day after leaving Helpmakaar. "We have not seen a solitary human being for the last day and a half; and I am simply dying of thirst. Surely you did not return by this route from the spot where you left the *umfaan*!"

The two men had left the little fortified village of Helpmakaar nearly a week ago, on their way to seek Jack, intending, first of all, of course, to pick up the spot where Soye had left the waggon, and then follow the latter by means of the wheel-tracks; but it now seemed as though the native must have lost his bearings; for instead of taking only three or four days over the journey, as Soye had promised, they had been travelling for six; and they still seemed just as far from finding the wheel-tracks as they had been when they started.

Just outside Helpmakaar Hugh had opened his valise, taken out the disguise he had bought from the Arab merchant, and first staining himself all over with the compound which he had procured for the purpose, clothed himself in the long silken robes of the Moham-medan trader, put a scarlet fez on his head and a pair of red slippers on his feet; and the transformation was complete. He already possessed a tolerably thick

black moustache, and directly he left Helpmakaar he allowed his beard to grow, with the result that, at the time when we now again encounter him, he had also the rudiments of a beard upon his chin, thus his appearance had become so greatly altered that his own mother would scarcely have recognised him, had she been alive. As yet, however, he had not had very much opportunity to test the efficacy of his disguise in the eyes of the Zulus, who seem to be gifted with a most extraordinary amount of perspicacity, for strangely enough, the two men had not thus far come to close quarters with the enemy. True, they had occasionally caught sight in the distance of small parties, or single individuals, but these had always passed at a distance, either not seeing them, or feeling no desire to enquire into the bona-fides of the travellers. The horse had been turned adrift nearly two days before, Soye having stated that they had now penetrated so far into Zululand that its presence was likely to be dangerous rather than otherwise, by attracting attention ; and they had come across no trace of any living soul ; indeed that particular part of the country seemed to be quite deserted. Soye and his master had finished their last particle of food that very morning, but their water had been exhausted on the previous afternoon, and as they had sighted no villages where liquid of any sort might be procured, and were traversing a region that was entirely waterless at that season of the year, they had been suffering intensely from thirst for several hours, thirst coming quickly on the African *veldt*. Soye, being a native, was able to endure the privation with stolid composure, but poor Marchmont, still weak from his wounds, felt that if he could not obtain water very soon he would break down altogether. His head was aching most

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consumedly, his skin was hot and dry, as though every particle of moisture had been drained out of his system, his lips were already hard, cracked and sore, and his tongue felt like a slab of dry leather in his mouth. Curious shapes and scenes began to flit before his eyes—the phantoms of a heated brain—and the poor fellow constantly believed that he saw water shimmering in the distance, and made feeble, spasmodic efforts to press forward and reach it. That last exclamation of his to the native was the only coherent speech that he had made for several hours, and the two men staggered forward in utter misery, the white man moving mechanically, while the faithful black supported his master as well as his own almost exhausted strength would allow.

The truth of the matter was that Soye, anxious to lead his master as quickly as possible to where he had left the waggon, had essayed to take what he believed would prove to be a short cut, with the result that, all land-marks in Zululand being remarkably alike, he had entirely lost his way and was now hoping, against hope that he might run across some village where food and drink might be procured, and where perchance they might find someone who had either seen or heard of the passage of a waggon containing a white boy, across the country. At first the two men had been averse from questioning the parties of Zulus whom they had seen in the distance, deeming it wisest to attract as little attention to themselves as possible; but now—they would almost have welcomed discovery, if that discovery might bring them relief from their torturing thirst.

They pushed forward for two or three hours longer, becoming weaker and still weaker with every minute that passed, and Hugh had just fallen prone on the

parched earth, utterly unable to proceed a step farther, when Soye, who still fortunately retained his faculties, imagined that he caught the sound of a number of men singing. He stood, therefore, listening intently. A slight breeze from the northward had sprung up within the last hour, and now, as he listened, Soye again heard the sound which had first attracted his attention. It was coming nearer, he told himself; and a few minutes later he was able to distinguish that the sound was caused by a number of Zulus chanting one of their curious marching songs. From the volume of the sound, however, it was evident that there could not be more than a hundred men or so, and the native at once surmised that they would be on the march to join one of the *impis* at Ulundi.

Just for a moment the Kafir hesitated as to whether he should attract their attention to his helpless master, and endeavour to procure food and water from them, or whether he should lie down and wait until they had gone past. A very few seconds' thought decided him, however; for he realized that, unless water could be procured before nightfall, his master would probably die, while he himself would be unable to hold out longer than until the following morning. His master, moreover, was dressed as an Arab; and unless Hugh, in his delirium, should chance to speak in English, it was not very likely that his disguise would be penetrated. And at any rate, even if Marchmont's identity should chance to be discovered, it would be better to perish quickly by the spear than to linger on, in inexpressible torments of thirst, waiting until death should release them.

At the very moment that Soye had made up his mind and was glancing eagerly round in order to

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discover just where the Zulus were, the head of their column made its appearance, rising out of a *donga* which he had not before perceived, and looking as though it were emerging out of the solid earth. The column soon left the depression in the ground and he saw that it was indeed made up of about a hundred Zulus, who were evidently marching to join the enemy, for they were accoutred in the full panoply of war, with feathered head-dresses, anklets of bright-coloured beads, leopard-skin *karoses* slung over their shoulders, and a bundle of assegais in their right hands; while over their left shoulders they carried the large black ox-hide shields which denoted that they belonged to the famous Undi regiment.

In a moment their keen eyes had caught sight of Soye, and they set up a great yell—whether of anger or greeting the Kafir was far too exhausted to judge, and quickening their stride, came sweeping along in magnificent order. A moment later they had arrived and stood looking from Soye to the recumbent figure at his feet, and from the figure back to Soye. Then their leader, a grey-haired old *induna* whose body was literally covered with scars, stepped forward and began to question the Kafir closely, at the same time turning the unconscious body of Hugh over with his foot in a contemptuous manner.

Who were they? Where did they come from? where were they going? What were they doing here? were only a few of the questions which came thronging to the *induna's* lips; and it was several minutes before the man ceased, giving Soye a chance to reply; when at length, however, he did so, the Kafir explained that his master was an Arab trader, travelling through Zululand for the purpose of doing business with the

people, but that they had lost their way several days ago and were now endeavouring to find a village where they might get water, when his master became so completely exhausted as to be unable to proceed further. Their merchandise, Soye explained craftily, they had been obliged to leave behind, as they had no longer the strength to carry it; and he told the Zulus that it lay, somewhere in the desert, about forty miles to the southward.

The *induna*, whose name it appeared was Sekukuni, watched Soye narrowly while he was telling his story, and when the native had finished he questioned him still more closely, evidently expecting to find some discrepancies in the Kafir's narrative; but, although nearly mad with thirst, the brave fellow kept his head and returned satisfactory answers; ending up with a request for *manszi* (water), and permission to accompany the Zulus until they should arrive at some village. For a moment it seemed as though the *induna* was about to refuse the request; but after a momentary pause Sekukuni turned to one of his men and commanded him to give Soye a drink of *tuyala* (Kafir beer). The thirsty "boy" seized the gourd and placed it to his lips, with an expression of wolfish eagerness on his face that elicited deep rumbling exclamations of "*Whau! whau!*" from the Zulus; but even as the liquid touched his tongue he remembered that Hugh's need was even greater than his own; so kneeling down and supporting his master's head on his knee, he put the neck of the gourd to Marchmont's mouth and tilted it up.

For a few seconds it seemed as though Marchmont were indeed dead, for although the liquid flowed into his mouth the throat was so completely closed that it

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could not pass into his stomach ; but little by little the *tuyala* softened the parched gullet and gradually the throat relaxed sufficiently to allow the beverage to flow down it. Then the effect was almost instantaneous; the Englishman simply sucked at the gourd until he had finished its contents ; then, with a gasp of ineffable satisfaction he opened his eyes, opening them wider still as they fell upon the ring of savage faces. Luckily, with the relief afforded by the long drink, his intelligence returned almost immediately, and Soye saw with satisfaction that his master had completely grasped the situation. Then, showing the empty gourd, Soye asked for a drink for himself and was at once given one, having evidently gained the approval and good opinion of the Zulus by his act of self-denial.

But although they seemed favourably disposed toward Soye, their behaviour with regard to Hugh was very different. That they had not penetrated his master's disguise, Soye felt certain, but even in the time of peace the Zulus only just tolerated the Arab traders and permitted them to enter their country because the merchants sometimes carried commodities which the warriors desired to possess ; and because now and again, they were able to smuggle a few rifles over the border. But now that the land was in a state of war they apparently regarded them with very different feelings, for hostility was writ large on their faces as they scowled down at the recumbent figure of Hugh. But presently the *induna* gave a sharp word of command to his men, at the same time telling Soye that he might accompany them to the next village—if he were strong enough to keep pace with them.

It was only as the band moved off at a rapid walk that the Kafir realized that the Zulus intended to

leave Hugh where he was, to perish by starvation or by the teeth of the wild beasts which at that time infested nearly the whole of Zululand. Soye, who was by no means lacking in courage and was also devoted to Hugh, thereupon took it upon himself to point out to the *induna* that to leave the (supposed) Arab helpless where he was upon the ground was equivalent to condemning the unfortunate man to death; to which the chief replied with a shrug of the shoulders, eloquent of both impatience and contempt, that so it might be, but that it was none of his (the *induna's*) business; nevertheless, if Soye preferred it, he would willingly put the man out of his misery by driving an assegai through his heart before leaving him. This, of course, was worse and worse, for the *induna* was already poisoning his broad-bladed assegai for the death-stroke ere Soye could make him understand that he wanted to save his master *alive* !

The faithful native very nearly paid for his temerity with his life; for humanity is a virtue very little understood by the Zulus, and Sekukuni only comprehended that he was in some sort being dictated to, the offence being all the more flagrant because it was being offered by a man of an alien race. There was a chorus of deep-throated growls from the *induna's* followers, and more than one voice urged the chief to "*bulala lo isinja 'n'ga Bantu*" (kill the Bantu dog), but Soye's quick wit came to his aid and enabled him to save the situation.

"Do not strike, O Great One," he said; "this man is one of Inzimbi's (Salvaterra's) agents, and he is now in search of him to tell him that a further consignment of guns is lying over the border, ready for transportation into this country. If you kill him,

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Inzimbi will never know where the guns are to be found and you will never receive them. It is in my mind too, that these weapons will prove of use to you, now that you are fighting the *Amalungu*."

"*Whau!*" replied Sekukuni, "is that so? Why did you not tell me that before, dog? I might have killed the man! So he is known to Inzimbi, is he? Well, he will be some time before he finds the '*Mlungu* (white man), for Inzimbi has other game on hand now." A burst of raucous laughter followed the words, and Soye pricked up his ears; it seemed as though with a little patience he might learn something. "Yes," resumed Sekukuni, "Inzimbi has brought a white boy into this country, whom he intends to give as a present to Cetewayo. I have seen him, and by the shadow of the Great Great One he is a fine lad. But should your master meet Inzimbi, let him tell him to keep his little captive out of the sight of the *isanusi*; for should they come to hear of him he will not keep him long, they will denounce the boy as an evil spirit—and we have a short way with *them*! Here Joba, here Xuvani, and you, Mopu, pick up that fellow"—pointing to Hugh who as a matter of fact had now completely recovered his senses and was eagerly listening to every word—"and bring him along. It is not far to the next kraal and a little work will do you no harm."

With a sullen glare at their chief, which they took care, however, not to let him see, the three men indicated shouldered Hugh's body, and then in obedience to a word of command from the *induna* the little band of warriors swung away again on their journey, setting up their monotonous marching chant as they did so.

So far as Hugh could make out they were travelling due east, and he was, therefore, being carried away from

the spot where Soye had left the waggon ; but " needs must " under the circumstances, and he consoled himself with the thought that he might by listening attentively hear more of Salvaterra and his own kidnapped brother.

Soye had been carefully watching his master and had soon come to the conclusion that Hugh was now only feigning to be unconscious while in reality he was very wide awake indeed, so the intelligent Kafir at once set to work to " pump " Sekukuni in Hugh's hearing of all that the *induna* knew with regard to the gun-runner ; but although the old warrior was quite unaware that he was being pumped, he seemed unable to tell Soye anything of importance. He only knew that Inzimbi had passed through the village which they were now approaching a fortnight before, and as he was a friend of the Zulus they had not troubled to ask him where he was going. All Sekukuni knew was that Salvaterra, accompanied by a waggon containing a small white boy with golden curls, had continued his journey somewhere to the northward ; and poor Hugh who was eagerly listening for news of his lost brother, was obliged to be content with learning even that much.

Although the mode of transit was anything but comfortable, Hugh continued to feign that he was insensible, for he knew that the moment he showed signs of recovery his bearers would naturally refuse to carry him any farther ; and he did not yet feel equal to the task of keeping up with his swift-footed companions ; besides, he was getting a good rest, and was husbanding the strength of which he might stand in very urgent need a little later on.

It was just becoming dusk when a shout from one of the men in the front rank announced that their goal was in sight, and half an hour later Hugh felt

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himself carried into a hut, where he was roughly flung down on the mud floor by the tired men who had been obliged to carry him. The latter did not wait to see whether their burden had returned to consciousness or not, but immediately hurried away to take part in the great "beer-drinking" which was already in preparation. Soye, however, seized the first opportunity that offered to slip away and join his master, whom he found fully recovered and sitting up in the corner of the hut. The two men then talked over the events of the day in a low tone of voice, so as to avoid attracting attention, and made their plans for the morrow. They decided to remain where they were until the Zulus had disappeared, and then to endeavour to obtain some knowledge of Salvaterra's whereabouts from the inhabitants of the kraal; having secured which they would get some water and provisions from them and again push forward on their search.

By the time that the two had arranged everything to their satisfaction, Hugh was feeling pretty completely exhausted for want of food and sleep. Soye therefore went out on a foraging expedition, and returned about half an hour later bearing with him a large pot of mealie-meal, a large bunch of bananas and a bowl of *tuyala*, or native beer. Of these the pair made an excellent meal, after which, having satisfied the cravings of his appetite, Hugh stretched himself out on the polished mud floor, made himself as comfortable as was possible under the circumstances; and in less than five minutes, and despite the fearful uproar made by the savages who had drunk themselves nearly mad, fell into profound sleep. Soye, faithful servant, kept watch as long as possible to guard his sleeping master from danger, but eventually he too, succumbed to the

embraces of Morpheus, and by the time that the uproar in the kraal had ceased, was fast asleep.

A quarter of an hour after Soye had lapsed into unconsciousness the reed curtain in front of the hut door was silently pulled aside, and a Zulu entered very quietly. He crept over to where Soye lay and held a piece of smouldering tinder close to the sleeping man's face, blowing gently on the stuff until it glowed sufficiently to enable him to distinguish Soye's features. He evidently recognised them, for he uttered a low "*whau!*" of satisfaction and crawled over to the place where Hugh lay. Here he went through the same process with the tinder, but when the glow illumined Marchmont's face the fellow seemed rather taken aback, as though Hugh were not the person he had expected to find.

The Zulu looked again more closely, then he shook his head after the manner of a man perplexed, took another long look at the supposed Arab merchant, and still shaking his head, slowly and carefully made his way out of the hut, dropping the reed curtain softly in front of the door as he went.

CHAPTER X

THE KILLING OF NONGOZA

WHEN Hugh awoke, he found that the sun was shining directly into the hut, through the curtain of reeds which served the purpose of a door ; and upon looking at his watch, which he carried hidden away among his clothes, and which he had taken care to wind every night, he found to his amazement that it was just midday ; so that he had slept nearly twelve hours. He now felt perfectly refreshed, but he still suffered from a most consuming thirst, due no doubt to the fact that on the previous day he had slaked it with enormous quantities of Kafir beer, and he was tremendously hungry. He therefore rose to his feet and walked over to Soye, who was still fast asleep, waking the fellow by prodding him gently in the ribs with his red leather slipper, which footgear, by the way, was already showing signs of the hard wear to which it had been subjected.

The Kafir grunted, stirred uneasily and presently sat bolt upright with a snort, looking round him in a confused manner which showed that he had not yet realized where he was. He soon recollected, however, and seeing Hugh standing by his side, sprang to his feet and saluted him with a deep-toned "*Baba ! Baba ! Inkos !*"

"Hush, you idiot," exclaimed Marchmont, looking

apprehensively at the door, "you are forgetting that I am not a white man at present, and that the Bantu do not salute Arab merchants with the title of *Inkos*. You must be more careful, my friend; for if any of the Amazulu were to guess that I am a '*Mlingu* (white man) in disguise it would mean death for both of us. Now, wake up and go outside and see whether you can find something for us to eat and drink, for I am hungry and thirsty enough for half a dozen men."

"*Lungile, 'Nkos* " (all right, chief), replied the Kafir, in a low tone; and still yawning prodigiously, after the manner of his kind, he pushed aside the reed curtain and went out into the enclosure in search of some provender, returning almost immediately with half a dozen mealie cobs, or heads of Indian corn, roasted whole, a piece of cooked meat of generous proportions, evidently a remnant of the ox killed on the previous evening to provide entertainment for the Zulu warriors, and a large bowl of native beer—which seemed to be the only beverage procurable in this part of the country, the water being so impure in its unadulterated condition as to be unfit for drinking purposes. These viands the faithful Soye placed on the ground before his master, who immediately fell to with great gusto, feeling, when he had finished, that he was now completely recovered from the effects of his horrible experiences during the previous week. When Marchmont had completed his meal, Soye began his own breakfast, talking the whole time between mouthfuls, also after the manner of his kind—a Kafir being unable to keep quiet at any time except when asleep; and he frequently talks, even then, so strong is the force of habit.

"'*Nkos*," exclaimed the native, appearing suddenly to recollect something, "I believe that harm is going to

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befall us and we shall do well to be watchful. There are evil spirits in this place ! ”

“ Stuff and nonsense, Soye,” returned his master, who, like most Englishmen, was very loth to believe in the occult, even though a long residence among the natives had proved to him that, as a celebrated poet once said, “ there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.” “ Rubbish, my boy ; there is no reason why harm should come to us if we are careful, and if you will not persist in calling me ‘ *Nkos* ’ before the Zulus. But what is your reason for thinking that there are evil spirits here ? ”

“ Well, ‘ *Nkos*, ’ answered Soye. “ I had a very bad dream last night ; and it was all so real that I am sure it portends disaster for us. I forced myself to remain awake for some time after you had fallen asleep ; for I meant to keep guard all night, being in an enemy’s kraal ; but in spite of myself slumber at last overtook me. I had not closed my eyes many minutes however, before, in my dream, I saw a man pull aside the mat at our door and enter the hut. I could see his features quite distinctly, though it was dark, and I should recognise the man again if I were to see him—as I undoubtedly shall, for the portent is certain to come true. He was an evil-looking man, very tall, with only one eye, and in his hand he carried a piece of glowing tinder. He crawled over to my side, and blowing on the tinder until it burst into a flame, looked long into my face, as though he desired to ascertain whether he really knew me, as he evidently thought he did. And he recognised me, for I saw him smile an evil smile and he muttered something to himself before crawling over to you, where he went through the same operation. With you, however, his behaviour was somewhat

different ; for it appeared to me in my dream that he expected to find a white man, but found instead an Arab trader. He shook his head in perplexity and then, after sitting on his haunches for some time watching you, he crawled out of the hut as silently as he had come. That was what I dreamed ; and I wish that my brother, who is an *isanuisi* (witch doctor), were with us, for he could then interpret the dream, and we could be upon our guard. I tell you, 'Nkos, there is misfortune in store for us."

Hugh was silent for a few moments ; he did not like to acknowledge, even to himself, that the Kafir's dream had made a profound impression upon him ; but now that the man mentioned it, Marchmont dimly recollected that he too had had an unpleasant impression, that his rest had been disturbed by the presence of some intruder, who had acted very much in the manner described by Soye. However, it would not do at all to admit as much to the native, therefore he forced a laugh, and again repeated the statement that, in his opinion, there was no danger to be apprehended from the mere circumstance that Soye had had an evil dream. " But, dream or no dream, Soye," he continued, " we must see about getting away from this place ; for we have come a long way out of our road already ; and if we do not hit upon the waggon-track very soon, the chances are that a storm of rain will have washed it away. Let me see," looking at his watch, " it is now past five o'clock ; we have wasted a great deal of time to-day, and yet not wasted it altogether, since we have rested ourselves and recovered our strength. Now it seems evident to me that you have entirely lost your way and do not know where to look for the spot where you left the waggon, any more

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than I do ; I think therefore that you had better go out and have a talk with the people of the kraal, and endeavour to learn from them whether they have heard anything of a waggon with white people passing through this part of the country, being careful also to tell them the same story that we told the Zulu warriors—that we want to find Inzimbi, in order to give him news concerning a certain consignment of guns which is ready for him. You had better go out and see whether you can find anybody—but hark !” he suddenly interrupted himself, starting to his feet, “ what noise is that ? Did you hear it, Soye ? It sounded to me as though a rat or snake were moving in the thatch, or—as if somebody had been leaning against it listening, outside the hut, to our talk.”

“ Yes, I heard it '*Nkos*,” replied the Kafir, in a low tone ; “ but we had better feign not to have noticed anything, for we are in the midst of the enemy and must be very careful how we act. Danger surrounds us on every hand, I know, or I should not have had that dream. Let us both go out and see whether we can find anybody with whom to talk. If we stay here the listener—if such there was—will guess that we have heard him and taken the alarm.”

So saying, Soye crawled out of the hut, followed by Hugh, and the two men found themselves in the very centre of the kraal enclosure, huts surrounding their own on every side ; but there was nobody to be seen, the Zulus being apparently engaged in taking their afternoon siesta. As they prowled round the kraal however, trying to find somebody whom they might question, Hugh had a most unpleasant sensation of being watched wherever he went by unseen eyes ; and so strong was the feeling that he continually turned

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round, quite expecting to see someone standing behind him.

Ten minutes sufficed them to make the complete circuit of the kraal, without setting eyes upon anyone; and they had just arrived at a little wooden gate, set in a high hedge of thorns which surrounded the enclosure. With a furtive look around him, Hugh drew Soye's attention to the fact that this gate was the exit nearest to the hut where they were living, an item of information which might prove to be very useful, if circumstances arose compelling them to make a hurried departure. He was just feeling at the latch, in order to ascertain how it worked, when without a sound, a Zulu appeared—apparently out of the earth itself, so quickly and yet so noiselessly had he arrived. How long he had been there Hugh could not tell, but it was perfectly evident that the man was under the impression that he and Soye had contemplated leaving the kraal, and had approached with the express intention to prevent any such procedure. The mere fact that he had done so at once assured Hugh that he was indeed being watched, and that in some way or other he had unfortunately aroused the suspicions of the Zulus. That of course meant that their departure would be prevented, and that they would be kept where they were until some chief or *induna* should come along and decide their fate.

In order to gain time, and perhaps in some measure to allay suspicion, Hugh was about to question the man about Salvaterra and the waggon, when his eyes happened to fall on Soye's face. The poor fellow's eyes were almost staring out of his head, his jaw had dropped, and an expression of abject terror overspread his countenance. Glancing quickly at the Zulu, to ascertain

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the cause of Soye's sudden fright, Marchmont at once perceived the reason, for the man was the exact counterpart of the one whom Soye had described as having appeared in his dream. The tall stature, the single evil-looking eye, the forbidding expression of face were all there ; and like a flash, Hugh's intuition told him that this man was indeed dangerous. The Zulu was looking full at Soye, and apparently gloating over the terror which his appearance had inspired in the Kafir, when Hugh, to break the spell which seemed to be weaving itself about them, asked the man whether he could tell them anything of Salvaterra's whereabouts, and whether he knew anything about a waggon containing a white boy, which was being driven about the country. Slowly the Zulu removed his eyes from Soye's face and the merest shadow of a smile crossed his own features.

"So," he replied, "the *Jan*" (Zulu name for any Asiatic), "wants to know where Inzimbi is to be found, does he ? He wants to find a waggon in which is a white boy, ha ! It is the boy you want to find, dog, not the waggon, nor Inzimbi. And I do not wonder, for he is too beautiful and young to be given to the *isanuisi* ; I, Nongoza, have seen him. But come with me to your hut and I will tell you where he is, so that you may find him and take him away, if Inzimbi does not kill you ; and I will also tell you—something else—something that you will be pleased to know." And the man went off into a fit of silent laughter which was so full of menace and spite that Hugh's blood ran cold. But it was necessary to preserve a bold front, otherwise matters might be precipitated, with fatal results. When the man was safely inside the hut—well, perhaps the tables might be turned.

"Very well," he replied, calmly ; "let us go to the hut ; for I am anxious to learn where Inzimbi is, and to get away in search of him as soon as possible."

With a short laugh, Nongoza strode rapidly away toward the hut which Hugh had recently left ; he did not therefore see the expressive look which the latter directed at Soye, who had now recovered his equanimity, nor the gesture which accompanied the look. If he had the possibility is that he would have called up his men and had them both slain on the instant.

A moment later and Nongoza had dived into the hut, closely followed by Hugh and Soye. By this time the sun had set and it was becoming dark, but there was still sufficient light for the three men to distinguish dimly each other's figures ; and while the Zulu seated himself at the far end, Hugh took up his position close in front of the man, and Soye very unostentatiously ranged himself against the wall at the side of Nongoza and about a couple of feet away. Another expressive glance passed between master and servant, but the Zulu was arranging himself in a comfortable posture ; so for the second time, he failed to notice something of vital importance to himself. Presently he spoke.

"Tell me," he said, "the real reason why you want to find Inzimbi ; you are not telling me the truth when you say that you are his agent and desire to inform him that a cargo of guns is ready for bringing into this country. I know Inzimbi very well ; he passed through this village only a fortnight ago and I asked him if we were going to get any more rifles from him. He told me that he did not intend to bring in any more for several months, because the amapolis were after him and he would have no opportunity ; he also said that he was engaged on another matter and he pulled aside the tent

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flap, showing me the child he had brought with him, inside. Ha! ha! Inzimbi is going to make himself popular with the *isanuisi*! But you, *you*," he went on, his voice vibrating with anger and menace, "you want to find him in order to take the boy away. Do you think that I, his friend, will let you do so? You are no Arab merchant, you dog of a dog; you are a '*mlunga*', and I knew you for such the moment I saw you; but to make still more certain I came into this hut last night and watched you while you were asleep. Aha! hearken to me. You are a white man, an officer of the *amasosa* (soldiers), and this dog is your servant. You shall neither of you leave this kraal alive. You shall die here, and Inzimbi shall possess his captive in peace. This Bantu shall die the death of impalement, as he is only a slave; but you" he cried, raising his voice, "shall died the death of the ants and honey, because you have dared to come here with a lie on your lips."

The man had already opened his lips to shout for the "slayers," who were doubtless only waiting for the signal to dash in and begin their gruesome work, when Hugh flung himself forward like a panther springing upon its prey, and gripped the one-eyed savage by the throat, intent only on preventing him from uttering the cry which would have sent them both to a horrible death; and Soye, his courage now fully returned, sprang gallantly to his master's assistance. The cry was choked in the man's throat, a thin inarticulate gurgle being the only sound that issued from his lips. But he was a big man and correspondingly powerful, and rising by a superhuman effort to his feet and dragging Hugh up also, he began to throw the young man about as a terrier does a rat, striving to release his own throat and to grip Marchmont's in return.

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But Hugh fully realised that a moment's relaxation of his fingers would be all sufficient to allow Nongoza to utter the shout which would bring the slayers about their ears, and he hung on like grim death, while Soye sprang upon the Zulu's shoulders from behind, endeavouring to drive his thumb into the man's one remaining eye, and at the same time to throw him to the floor. For a brief instant it seemed as though Nongoza, in his frantic struggles for freedom, would fling off both his assailants, but with every second that passed he became weaker from lack of breath ; and a second later Soye curled his long legs round the Zulu's knees, flung his whole weight backward, and with a crash, the three writhing, struggling men came to the ground, with Hugh's fingers still gripping Nongoza's wind-pipe.

On entering the hut, the Zulu had, contrary to the usual Zulu etiquette, carried in with him his broad-bladed *ixwa* and his shield ; but he had foolishly laid them down by his side while he was talking to Hugh, and his carelessness was now to be paid for with his life. For seeing the weapon lying in a corner where it had been kicked during the struggle, Soye relinquished his hold upon the Zulu for an instant and snatched up the assegai. Then as the two combatants rolled over and over on the mud floor, he poised the blade and waited his opportunity. It came a second later when, for a moment, the two men were lying side by side, utterly exhausted for want of breath. Like a flash the Kafir raised the assegai and then brought it down with all his strength upon the Zulu's left side. A single convulsive twitch of the body followed and then the man lay still. For Soye in his desperation had driven the terrible *ixwa* clean through Nongosa's

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heart and body, literally pinning him to the earth and of course instantly killing him.

Hugh rose to his feet, breathless from the struggle, and glanced apprehensively at the door, for he felt convinced that the commotion of the fight must have been heard at a distance of yards away; but not a solitary Zulu put in an appearance, while outside the hut all was silent as the grave. Now was their opportunity to escape, if they were to get away with their lives, for at any moment Nongoza's prolonged absence might be noticed by the expectant slayers, and then they would certainly come straight to the hut to look for him.

"Quick, Soye," Hugh exclaimed, breathlessly, "pull out that assegai, and take it with you when you go; you may need it badly. Then pick up as much of that food as you can carry, while I take the remainder and the *tuyala* gourd; that is all the food and drink we shall be able to obtain from here. I will go first, with my revolver, you must follow closely after me, using the spear if necessary; but move noiselessly, for we may be able to get away unseen, since it is dark. Now then, are you ready? Then come along."

Drawing his revolver from the folds of his robe, where he kept it concealed, Hugh led the way; and silently as cats the two men slipped out of the hut into the enclosure, where it was now perfectly dark, save for the faint light cast by the stars, which only just served to show the fugitives the outline of the numerous huts which constituted the kraal. Once outside they listened attentively for any sounds which might tell them the whereabouts of the enemy who, Hugh felt certain were somewhere, lying in wait; and he immediately heard the dull humming noise which is always

in evidence when a number of people are gathered together. Luckily, it appeared to come from a quarter of the enclosure remote from the little wooden gate in the thorn hedge; so gathering up his long robe, he pushed along, threading his way among the huts and making for the only exit of whose position he was aware, closely followed by Soye, who carried his assegai at the "Charge."

But they were not to escape undiscovered, for suddenly one of the mongrel curs which swarm in Zulu villages, and which are employed by the natives in hunting down bush-buck, came dashing out of a hut, and began to snap and snarl viciously at Hugh as he strode past. It was the beast's last action; for Soye putting on a spurt, got within reach of the animal and spitted it on the blade of his terrible weapon; but directly afterward the fugitives heard a great shout go up from somewhere behind them, with a sudden pattering of native feet and hoarse shouts of "*ulete lapa izinja*" (bring hither the dogs), while several assagais, thrown at random, went humming close past their heads, to stick quivering in the ground a few yards in front of them.

"Hurry up, Soye," exclaimed Hugh, breaking into a run, and plucking a couple of assegais out of the ground as he went; "look sharp, boy; they have discovered our flight and are putting the dogs on our track." His last words were drowned in a chorus of yells, barks, and hoarse baying which emphasised the need for haste far more than any words of his could do; and shoulder to shoulder, with beating hearts and straining sinews, the two men rushed at the gate which stood between them and freedom. Half a dozen yards more, and they would have been through without

opposition, but they were just too late to get clear without fighting, for a couple of the savages bounded out of the gate, presenting the blades of their assegais. No time to stop now however, with the others howling like a pack of wolves in full cry on their heels. There was a quick flash of steel against steel, a hurried stroke or two, and a heavy groan. The two guards were down, and with a might effort Marchmont wrenched the gate open without waiting to unfasten it.

Through it they went, without any pause, save to slam it close behind them, in the hope that it might delay their pursuers for a few seconds, then on again, clear of the kraal at last, dashing through the darkness with the dogs baying close at their heels. Half a mile was covered, during which a couple of dogs had been killed, when Hugh's breath began to fail him; and knowing that he could not go on very much farther, he looked quickly about for some place where they might with advantage make a stand against their pursuers. To his infinite relief he saw, but a short distance ahead, a number of big boulders, ranging from eight to fourteen or fifteen feet in height, surrounded by thick brushwood; and toward these the fugitives at once directed their steps.

Selecting the highest, Hugh drew up, panting, at its base, and with a word to Soye, jumped on the Kafir's back, thence being able to reach a projecting ledge, from which he leaned down to assist the native, hauling him into safety just as the foremost dogs ran snarling and snapping to the base of the rock. Another quick climb, and the two men found themselves hidden from the sight of anyone below in a deep indentation on the top of the rock. Unfortunately however, the rock was easy to climb, and was also

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surrounded by trees, the branches of which hung over and around the tiny stronghold. But there was little time for thought and less for a reconsideration of their plans ; the moment for action was at hand and with a quick " Look out—here they come ! " to Soye, Hugh grasped his trusty revolver and prepared to do battle for his life.

CHAPTER XI

WITCHCRAFT, OR ——?

HUGH and Soye took no notice of the dogs, for they were well out of their reach ; but as the foremost Zulu came charging up to the rock, glaring ferociously about him in search of his prey, Marchmont cocked his revolver and cautiously raising his head above the edge of the rock, pointed the weapon and pulled the trigger just as a narrow-bladed casting assegai whizzed past his ear and stuck quivering in a tree close behind the boulder. The great savage stood perfectly upright and still for one brief moment, then he gave vent to a curious, gasping grunt, and sank down dead at the foot of the rock, at the precise moment when his companions reached him. There was at once a hoarse chorus of Zulu maledictions, and the 'savages instantly proceeded to cast a volley of assegais straight up into the air, in the hope that they would fall, point downward upon the top of the rock ; but fortunately for the two men, the foliage of the trees overshadowing them was so thick that it deflected the falling assegais ; and the only casualty was that of a native, who was impaled by one of the descending weapons, out of the way of which he had just failed to step in time.

The moment that the spears were thrown, Hugh leant quickly over the top of the rock and discharged the remaining five chambers of his revolver into the

crowd, killing three and wounding two, while Soye pulling out of the tree behind him the assegai which the first Zulu had flung, also sent it hissing into the body of one of the besiegers, killing him on the spot. Maddened at being thus picked off without the ability to retaliate, half a dozen of the enemy made a quick rush, and contrived to reach the cover of the trees before Hugh had time to reload, when they at once began to scale two of the trunks on the side remote from the fugitives, while the remainder strove to distract Hugh's and Soye's attention from their comrades by keeping up a continuous shower of assegais. The rock was only about fifteen feet high, and the Zulus who were climbing the trees soon reached some branches which commanded a view of the top, when they at once began to hurl their spears. Fortunately for the besieged, they had not been able to carry many of these weapons up with them ; and what with the darkness, and the necessity to hang on to the tree-trunk with one hand, while they cast with the other, the aim of the savages was very indifferent, and they quickly exhausted their supply of assegais without in the least damaging Marchmont or his servant.

Hugh having now reloaded his revolver, fired in the direction from which the spears were coming, but it happened that instead of being faintly silhouetted against the earth, as were the Zulus below, the men in the trees were enveloped in deep shadow, so that it became almost impossible to fire with any chance of success ; yet the young Englishman was lucky enough to send at least a couple of the enemy tumbling from their precarious perches, while the others, having expended all their weapons, slid quickly to the ground, unwilling to face the chance of death at the muzzle of the

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unerring revolver which the '*mlungu* (white man) seemed able to use as well in the dark as in the light. The top of the rock was by this time well covered with assegais which by the most marvellous good luck had all missed their mark, and with these Hugh and Soye kept up a galling fusillade upon the enemy, a proceeding which stung the Zulus to madness, unable as they were to retaliate. Presently one of them seized a dog in his arms and, taking a short run forward, literally flung the yelping animal up on to the top of the rock ; but it was only a small brute, and before it had found time to collect its senses, scattered by its unceremonious treatment, Soye seized it and flung it back upon the Zulus below.

At last the besiegers began to tire of a game in which they received all the blows and were able to give none in return ; and slowly and sullenly they began to draw off, to Hugh's vast relief. But Soye soon enlightened his master as to the true state of affairs, informing him that he was quite mistaken if he supposed that the Zulus contemplated abandoning the attack ; what they intended was simple to get out of revolver range, and then wait until the morning, when they would be better able to see what they were about. In all probability, too, he added, they would send a messenger forward to the next kraal to bring up a body of men sufficient to surround the rock entirely, so that there might be no possibility of escape ; and they would then wait below and fight the fight of 'sit down' until hunger and thirst compelled their enemies either to descend and surrender themselves to a death made hideous by every refinement of torture that the savage invention could devise, or die where they were.

Hugh soon realised that what Soye had said was

only too true; for he caught glimpses, now and then, of dim shapes flitting about among the trees, and he knew from their movements that the Zulus were gathering dry wood in order to make the fires which a few minutes later were glowing in an almost complete circle round the rock. There was but one place where the circle seemed to be broken, and that was where the undergrowth was thickest, where it was impossible to build a fire without first clearing away a considerable quantity of brushwood. But he told himself he could not be by any means certain that the apparently vacant space would not be strongly occupied by the enemy.

Something would have to be done, however, and that soon, for Marchmont, looking cautiously over the edge of the rock, saw a couple of stalwart Zulus set off at a quick run, and upon drawing the Kafir's attention to the fact, Soye informed him that he believed there was another kraal lying at a distance of some five or six miles away in the direction which the natives had taken, and that it was more than probable that the men were going there to fetch assistance.

"We must be getting away from here, then," remarked Hugh, "as soon as we can. There may be a chance of escape now, but there will be none when those fellows bring back their friends. Now I am going to do a little shooting, with the object of inducing our besiegers to move somewhat farther away; and if they will but widen that circle a bit we may be able to get down from this boulder, unseen, and escape through the thick bush, where they have no fires lighted." Suiting the action to the word, he re-loaded his six-shooter, and taking careful aim at a man who was, for a moment, outlined against the fire-light, pulled the trigger. There followed a shriek of agony and the Zulu sprang convulsively

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to his feet, only to fall headlong the next instant, into the flames. His friends at once rushed to his assistance and pulled him out ; but even at that distance, Hugh was able to see that the man was dead ; and he dropped a couple more of the enemy while they were carrying the body away. The Zulus retaliated with another volley of assegais, but by lying flat down in their shelter the two fugitives were easily able to avoid the weapons ; and after several more shots from Hugh's revolver had taken effect upon the savages they began to retire to a distance, so as to be out of range.

"Now," whispered Hugh to Soye, "we will wait a few seconds, until those fires have died down a little, so that there will be somewhat less light, and then, when I give the word, we must both slip down as quietly as possible, and try to get away through the bush. I only hope that none of their wretched dogs are prowling about near here, for if they are they will surely bark and so raise an alarm. However, we must take our chance of that. Gather up all the assegais that are lying about here, boy ; they may come in very handy later on. Those fires are not giving so much light now," he resumed, about ten minutes later ; "we had better therefore make the attempt at once, or it will be too late ; for the runners will be back within the next hour, probably, bringing reinforcements with them. You go first, Soye, and I will lower you down ; then wait below for me and ease my fall as much as possible. Softly, now, and remember that you will pay for it with your life if you make the slightest noise. Over you go ! That's it."

There was no need to caution the Kafir however, for he knew the danger that they were in quite as well as his master, and he slid over the edge of the rock without

making a sound. A moment later a very low whistle announced that he had reached the ground and was ready for Hugh to make the descent ; whereupon the Englishman lowered himself until he was hanging by the extreme tips of his fingers. He felt cautiously about with his feet, and presently felt them clasped by a pair of hands, while a soft voice whispered : "All right, 'Nkos, I have got you ; let yourself go now." Hugh released his grip upon the rock, and leaning against the boulder so that he might not fall backward, felt himself lowered gently until he stood upon Soye's shoulders, after which the rest was easy.

The two men then strained their eyes through the darkness, and perceived that although the Zulus near the fire were plainly visible, there did not appear to be anyone on guard among the brushwood ; therefore, treading very carefully, and only advancing a pace or two at a time, they directed their steps toward the thick bush, in the shadow of which they found themselves, to their great relief, a few minutes later. A path of some kind, or an opening, had to be found, however ; for if they tried to force their way through the undergrowth, the rustling would surely betray them ; so when Marchmont found a path in front of them which might have been made expressly for the fugitives' benefit he felt that fortune was indeed favouring them.

Their troubles were not yet quite over, for as they glided cautiously along, Soye, who was leading, suddenly drew up with a jerk, pointing in front of him ; and looking in the direction indicated, the young man saw that their passage was barred by a Zulu who was evidently guarding that particular path, but who luckily had his back turned toward them at the moment. Swiftly as a snake striking, Hugh seized an assegai from

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the sheaf that Soye was carrying and, without a word, crept slowly and silently toward the unsuspecting man. Presently he was only a foot away from the unconscious sentry, and although he hated the idea of killing an unprepared man he dared not act otherwise, so, setting his teeth, and raising the broad-bladed assegai above his head, he drove it with all his strength into the savage's back. There was a thud that Hugh felt could have been heard yards away, but that was the only sound, for the keen weapon had pierced the Zulu's heart, killing him before he knew the manner of his death. The dead body collapsed and lay motionless on the ground ; while with a quite considerable effort of strength Hugh recovered his weapon ; and the fugitives moved forward again. Fortunately for them the dead man had been the only guard, and in a few minutes they were far enough out of earshot to be able to proceed with less caution and greater expedition ; and five minutes later they broke into a run which would soon take them far away from the men who were still watching the rock and gloating over the anticipation of the torture to which they intended to put their prey, when secured. Marchmont listened carefully for any sounds which should tell him that their escape had been discovered ; but to his vast relief none came, and he knew that unless they fell in with any more Zulus, they were for the present safe.

All through the night master and man pushed forward without pausing, and by the time that day dawned, Hugh reckoned that they must have put nearly twenty miles between themselves and the Zulus, who probably had not even yet discovered their absence. The next thing now was to find the place where Soye had left the waggon ; for until they hit upon the track it seemed

as though nothing useful could be done ; so with this idea they began to strike westward again, in the hope that by so doing they might come upon the wheel tracks.

For two days and nights they went forward, heading west and north, existing on the food which they had managed to bring away from the native village ; and they were now looking about for a place where they might shelter for the night, as the darkness was fast drawing down. They had by this time come into a somewhat mountainous region, and were traversing a deep cleft in the rock, with cliffs towering high above them on either side, when Soye, who was as usual leading the way, suddenly stopped, and wheeling round, gripped his master's arm and forced him quickly behind a rock.

"There is a man coming this way, '*Nkas*," he whispered hurriedly ; " I can only see one, a native, at present, but there may be more of them behind, so we had better stay here until we can learn whether he is alone or not. If he is by himself it may be fortunate that we have come across him, for he may be able to give us the information for which we are searching. Keep quiet, *Baas*, he will be here in a few minutes. Let me lie where you are, so that I can keep watch upon him as he comes along."

Without speaking a word, Hugh changed places with the Kafir, taking care not to move out of the shelter of the rock while so doing, and Soye, stretching himself at full length on the ground, looked carefully round the edge of the boulder, keeping a watchful eye upon the advancing black. He had not been watching more than a minute or two when Marchmont heard him give vent to a long-drawn whistle of astonishment, followed

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by several guttural exclamations of "*whau!*" and the man began to scramble hurriedly to his feet.

"Steady! steady, you idiot!" hissed Hugh angrily, "you'll let yourself be seen if you carry on in that fashion. Lie down man; lie down and be quiet."

"It is all right, *Baas*," returned Soye, disclosing his white teeth in a broad grin, "there is nothing to fear from this man; he is my brother, Tambusa. How he got here I don't know, for I haven't seen him for some months; but we shall soon find out. *Bulani!* he will be astonished to find he here." And stepping quickly out from behind the rock, he made a funnel with his hands, putting them to his mouth and shouting: "Hi, Tambusa! Hi! come hither; here am I, brother of mine. It is I, Soye!"

The next moment Hugh heard a joyful whoop, and a few seconds Tambusa and his brother were exchanging guttural greetings and shaking hands energetically, after the manner of the white man. As soon as they had greeted one another, Soye presented Tambusa to Marchmont, who had been an amused spectator of the little scene, and great was the other native's astonishment upon learning that the supposed Arab merchant was in reality a white man. He saluted gravely, however, and announced that as he had found his brother, from whom he had so long been parted, he was not going to lose sight of him again, and that therefore he would accompany the white chief on his wanderings. Soye then went quickly through a recital of their recent adventures, which elicited many exclamations of astonishment from Tambus, and what was much more to the point, an offer of food and shelter, so long as they might wish it, in the little cave in the

mountain-side wherein the man had, for so many months, made his home.

This the two wearied travellers were only too glad to accept ; and Tambusa, in high feather at being allowed the honour of entertaining a white man, immediately asked them to accompany him, leading them quickly up the path by which he had just come. It was a long and difficult climb which Hugh had to accomplish, and he was feeling pretty well worn out by the time that they at last reached the cave where Tambusa, the *isanuusi*, had his dwelling ; so tired, indeed, was he that, without waiting for refreshment of any kind, he threw himself down on the floor of the cavern, and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

It was dark by the time that he awoke, and for a few minutes he had a little difficulty in remembering where he was ; but as consciousness returned, memory came with it, and he determined to lose no time in questioning Tambusa upon the subject which was all times nearest to his heart. The cave, however quite dark, and Hugh could hear nothing of the two occupants whom he supposed were there, raised himself upon his elbow and called out :

“Hi, Soye, are you awake ? ”

The Englishman's voice echoed sonorously around the cavern, but there was no human response, and a curious eerie feeling took possession of him. He felt as though the throbbing darkness were peopled with shadows ; dim forms seemed to his heated imagination to be flitting about from place to place ; and now that he was listening intently to hear whether he could detect indications of the whereabouts of the two Kafirs, strange sibilant whisperings seemed to fill all the air around him. In fact he was conscious of that strange

feeling which people sometimes have when they awake suddenly in the middle of the night, feeling sure that the room is tenanted by someone beside themselves. Hugh would have felt much more comfortable could he have had his back against the wall, for he would then have been free from the unpleasant sensation, which possessed him very strongly, of being watched from behind; but he had taken little notice of the cavern when he entered it, and so did not care to move about in the inky darkness, lest, by doing so, he should come into too forcible contact with something, or fall down some hole or other. Besides, he had an unpleasant feeling that if he tried to move he would be forcibly prevented; and he had no desire to be touched by one of the unclean phantoms which he believed were flitting through the darkness. Possibly he was a little lightheaded from over-fatigue.

Therefore he continued to lie where he was, a prey to stranger nervous apprehensions than he had ever before experienced in the whole course of his life, and the strain was rapidly becoming unendurable when, to his great relief, he caught the far-off sound of voices, and saw the darkness faintly lit up by the light of an approaching torch. As the gloom gradually dispersed Hugh looked fearfully around him, and he could almost have sworn that, as he did so, a curiously misshaped figure of a man disappeared into the darkness at the far end of the cave, which he now perceived was of enormous dimensions. His feeling of apprehension was only momentary, for the next instant Soye and his brother marched into the cavern, the former carrying a torch, while the latter had his arms full of something that looked like a bundle of herbs.

As they entered, both men looked quickly and keenly

at Hugh, and when they saw that he was awake they exchanged a word or two in some language which the Englishman did not understand, before giving him the customary salute. Tambusa then threw his armful of herbs on the floor and walked across to Hugh.

Squatting on the floor in front of Marchmont, the Kafir remarked :

“ 'Nkos, my brother tells me that you have come disguised into the country of the Amazulu for the purpose of finding your young brother, who has been carried off by the man whom the Zulus call Inzimbi—is it not so ? And that you want to find someone who has seen the waggon containing him, so that you may know where to search ? Well, I, Tambusa, have not seen the boy, nor have I met Inzimbi for some months ; but my brother tells me that he has informed you I am an *isanuisi* ; and therefore, if you wish it, I will try to discover, by means of my craft, where your *umfaan* now is, and how you may find him. Would you like me to do so ? ”

Hugh had of course heard, as has every white man who has lived long among the Zulus, of the extraordinary powers claimed by the *isanuisi*, or wizards ; but he had never yet had any experience of them, for the simple reason that the natives are usually very chary of permitting a white man to witness any of their rites ; and, naturally, he had very little faith in their claims. He had arrived at such a pitch of anxiety as to the fate of his brother that he would have welcomed any suggestion, however extravagant or improbable, which offered him the possibility of help in his search for Jack. The *isanuisi* claimed superhuman powers in the matter of second sight and the ability to look into the future ! Well and good ; it was just within the bounds

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of possibility that this brother of Soye's might be able to help him ; at all events he was quite ready to let him try.

" All right, Tambusa," he replied ; " if you think you can help me in my search by means of your art, you have my permission to do so ; for I would willingly give a large reward to the man who should put it into my power to recover my brother, and to punish the villain who has done me so much harm. Ay ! by all means Tambusa, call up your spirits, man, and let us hear what they have to say," he concluded in a somewhat bantering tone.

Not in the least offended at the white man's raillery, the *isanuisi* rose to his feet and said something to Soye, again using the language that Hugh did not understand ; and the latter worthy immediately set to work to make a large fire, over which, when it was well alight, he suspended an iron pot, somewhat similar to those in which the Kafirs cook their food. Into this he poured a quantity of water, and when it came to the boil Tambusa stepped up and placed in it several handfuls of the curious-looking herbs which he and his brother had brought into the cavern with them. Almost immediately a most deliciously fragrant perfume began to issue from the cauldron, and it very soon penetrated every nook and cranny of the cavern, seeming, in some extraordinary way, to act as a sort of soporific on Marchmont, for he felt a delightful sensation of languor beginning to steal over him, while his over-strained nerves quickly returned to their normal healthy condition.

As the perfumed steam arose from the cauldron the air in the cavern became more and more dense, until Soye and Tambusa appeared to be moving about in an almost impenetrable mist. The heavy air caused

Marchmont no inconvenience, he breathed quite as freely as though he were in the open, and his whole being seemed to be undergoing a transformation, almost indeed a rejuvenation. Instead of feeling hopeless, weary, and dispirited, as he had done before Soye and Tambusa had come in, he now felt fresh, hopeful and wonderfully energetic, ready for any adventure, ready to travel for miles unnumbered without experiencing the least fatigue ; in short a sense of well-being and perfect health pervaded his whole frame, beyond anything that he had ever before experienced in all his life.

Gradually, however, this sensation of happiness and delicious languor gave place to a sensation of drowsiness, and Marchmont several times pulled himself together when on the point of falling into a doze. The movements of the natives were now almost entirely concealed by a thick mist, in the middle of which the fire blazed redly with an almost unearthly glow, and Hugh could only discern with the utmost difficulty that Soye was now seated close beside the pot, carefully stirring its contents, while Tambusa stood upright, his arms stretched out in front of him, seeming as though he were muttering some incantation. In spite of himself Marchmont now began to feel impressed by the ceremony, and the weird sensation which he had before felt only such a short time before—that the cavern was filled with beings from another world—began to creep over him with renewed force.

Then, as Hugh was gazing hard at Tambusa, in breathless expectancy of what was about to happen next, the smoke or steam immediately above the cauldron seemed gradually to become luminous, and a circle of bluish-green light hovered in mid-air some

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five or six feet above the floor of the cavern. With an effort, Hugh withdrew his eyes for a second from this ever-brightening circle of light and looked round for the natives ; but neither of them was now to be seen ; they had vanished, and as if by some overpowering force his eyes were once more turned toward the magic circle of light.

Slowly, very slowly, something dark began to make its appearance in the midst of the brilliant background ; and Marchmont presently realized that this "something" was beginning to assume a definite shape. It was, he told himself, for all the world like one of those dissolving views which he had sometimes seen in the Town Hall at Durban, when visiting that city ; and then to his wondering eyes the picture seemed complete. There before him lay the exact presentment and simulacrum of a cluster of huts surrounded by a thorn fence, outside which a number of armed Zulus were pacing up and down, apparently on guard ; but it was one particular hut, slightly larger than any of the rest, to which Marchmont's eyes were, almost in spite of himself, directed ; and as he looked, the wall of the hut nearest him seemed to melt away, and there before his eyes lay the figure of his young brother !

Although Hugh was quite conscious of the fact that it was still night where he himself happened to be, it seemed broad day at the kraal where Jack lay, and he could see the lad quite plainly. He was lying asleep with his head upon an arm, while his face was turned directly toward Hugh, and his brother's heart bled to see how small and white the childish face had grown. When Marchmont first looked upon him he was alone in the hut, but suddenly the reed mat before the door was pushed aside and a man crawled through into the

apartment, where he stood looking down upon the sleeping child with a bitter smile upon his face.

Hugh's heart leaped as though it would burst from his bosom, and the pulse beat fast and thick in his throat, for he immediately recognised the figure of his arch enemy, Manoel Salvaterra, the gun-runner! How Hugh wished then that Providence would give him wings so that he might fly to the defence of the boy. Wishing however, was vain, and he was about to receive an additional pang, for even as he glanced at the scoundrel who had robbed him of all he held most dear, Salvaterra bent down and shook the sleeping lad.

With a start Jack awoke, only to shrink back against the wall when he recognised the identity of the intruder, his whole face and attitude eloquent of the terror and loathing that the man inspired in him, seeing which Salvaterra threw back his head and laughed, the low, evil laugh of a thoroughly vile man who scorns not to ill-treat a young child. Hugh's hands clenched at the sight until the finger nails dug deep into the palm and drew the slowly oozing blood from them, and he ground his teeth in impotent agony at the thought of being unable to afford the aid which his brother seemed sorely to need.

Then Salvaterra leant forward and whispered long and earnestly in Jack's ear, unmindful of the fact that the lad shrank away from him until the mud wall of the hut stopped his further progress. For perhaps ten minutes, he spoke rapidly to the boy, and then he rose to his feet and left the hut, stopping in the doorway to turn round and laugh at the fears he had inspired before he finally left him.

Jack sat still for a few seconds after the man had gone, an expression of awful fear stamped on his small

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features ; then he flung himself down on the floor and shrieked out : “ Oh, Hugh, Hugh, come to me quickly ; come quickly and take me away from this awful man and the terrible things he says he will do to me.”

Then the picture suddenly vanished, and the dull red glow of the fire faded ; and overcome by the horror of what he had seen, and his own utter helplessness, Marchmont fell forward, swooning, upon the hard floor of the cavern.

CHAPTER XII

THE TORTURE OF THE ANTS

"DRINK a little more of this, 'Nkos, drink a little more of this," were the first words that Hugh heard when consciousness again returned to him; and opening his eyes, he found that the faithful Soye was holding to his lips a cup containing some strong-smelling pungent liquid. He was intensely thirsty, and felt altogether as though he had just passed through some dreadfully exhausting experience, for he was utterly worn out; but as his senses gradually returned it seemed to him as though what he had seen in the cavern was but the figment of his overheated imagination, a horrible nightmare which he would forget as soon as the brilliant South African morning dawned.

Marchmont seized the cup which was held to his lips and drained it eagerly; and no sooner had he swallowed its contents than he felt as though new life were running through his veins; his terrible sensation of lassitude disappeared entirely, and all his natural energy came back to him with redoubled force. Moreover the vision he had just seen did not now appear so much like a nightmare as a heaven-sent glimpse of what was actually occurring away there to the north, as a warning to him to hasten to the assistance of his much-loved brother before it should be too late. The scene, too, remained stamped clearly in his mind's eye, and the

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more he considered the matter the more he felt convinced that by some mysterious agency he had been permitted to see the kraal where Jack was being kept a prisoner, so that, when he came to the place he might recognise it and so effect the rescue of his brother. How Tambusa had contrived to show him the picture he did not know, but he was fully aware that the Zulus and Kafirs are credited with being much more fully acquainted with the science of psychology than are any Europeans ; and he scarcely felt any astonishment now at the fact that Tambusa had been able to show him Jack's whereabouts in a vision ; and that he had indeed looked upon his prison, and would thus be able to discover it, he felt certain. The only doubt in the Englishman's mind was whether he could arrive in time to save the boy from the machinations of that double-dyed scoundrel, Manoel Salvaterra.

Presently Hugh awoke from the sleep that had succeeded his reverie, severely blaming himself that he had already wasted so much time before resuming his search for his brother. He now felt completely recovered, and in better spirits than he had been since Soye had brought him the dreadful news of Jack's abduction. Glancing quickly toward the door of the cavern, Marchmont saw that the sky was already brightening before the rising sun, and therefore there would be enough light in a few minutes to enable them to start on their journey.

"Now then, Soye, my boy," he exclaimed to the Kafir who, seated on the ground, was conversing in low tones with his brother, "look alive ! Put some provisions together, that is to say if your brother has any to spare ; and is there any vessel in which we can carry water ?"

Tambusa smiled at Hugh's eagerness, and then muttered something to Soye, who immediately rose to his feet and went into the back part of the cave, where he proceeded to unearth a supply of provisions and water which the *isanuisi* had evidently stored there for his own use.

"*Whau ! 'Nkos !*" ejaculated Tambusa, "do not let us be in too great a hurry ; we must walk before we can run. Soye has gone to put together the food and water, and it will be ready in a few minutes ; but, *'Nkos*, in which direction are you going to prosecute your search ? Do you know exactly where the *umfaan* now lies ? I ask, because although I was able to make you see the place where he is, I myself saw nothing. I was only the instrument by means of which the spirits showed you the vision. You doubtless know what the place looks like, and would recognise it when you saw it ; but in which direction do you intend to look for it ?"

"By Jove !" exclaimed Hugh despairingly, "I never thought of that ! The spot is so clearly printed on my mind that I was imagining the only thing I had to do was to leave the cavern and walk straight to the village where my brother is. Of course I do not know in which direction we ought to go ; and there is no means of finding out. Merciful Powers !" he groaned, "this is maddening ! To know that Jack is in the power of that brute ; to know what his prison looks like ; and not to know where I am to find it !"

"Softly, softly, *'Nkos*," broke in Tambusa ; "I need not have showed you the vision, had I not believed that by so doing I might be able to help you. You know what the kraal looks like ; describe it to me, then, for I know nearly every village in Zululand, and it will be very strange if I do not recognise this place from your

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description of it. Describe it very carefully to me, *Baas*, and tell me what the scenery round about it looks like."

Poor Hugh clutched at Tambusa's suggestion like a drowning man at a straw ; for their only chance of success lay in the possibility of the Kafir identifying the place from his description of it. He forthwith launched into a recital of his vision, giving Tambusa the most minute details as to the appearance of the kraal and of the surrounding country, watching the Kafir's face the whole time that he was doing so, with an expression of mingled hope and despair which showed plainly the anxiety he felt lest the *isanuusi* should be unable to recognise the locality from his description.

For some minutes after Marchmont had finished speaking Tambusa remained seated with his eyes fixed upon the floor of the cavern, his brows contracted in a deep frown which showed the anxious watcher that he had not yet identified the locality of the kraal, and despair again began to clutch at the poor man's heart ; for his only hope of saving Jack lay in Tambusa's thorough knowledge of Zululand. He was on the point of questioning the Kafir as to whether he had not some recollection of the place, when Tambusa suddenly thumped his fist into the palm of the other hand, and looking up quickly with a grin on his face, exclaimed : ' What a fool am I, 'Nkos ! Here have I been wasting time in striving to fix this kraal in some locality at a long distance from here and I was almost beginning to think that I could never have seen the spot ; for it never occurred to me that the place might be anywhere near at hand. Why, 'Nkos." he continued, excitedly " I know the kraal very well, for I have passed it nearly every day for months past. It is quite close at hand,

not a day's march from here ; and if we start from this place at once we ought to reach the kraal where your brother is by this evening, quite easily. *Whau !* I am glad, *Baas*, that I remembered ; for I was beginning to think that my skill was at fault. *Hi !* Soye," he broke off suddenly, " you need not make up a large parcel of food, for we have only a couple of day's journey before us—one there, one back. It might have been much worse, '*Nkos*," he continued to Marchmont, whose face had now regained its customary cheerful appearance. " That kraal might have been several weeks' march from here. Now, my plan is this : Soye and I will accompany you, and give you all the help in our power to enable you to recover your brother ; and when you have secured him we will guide you back to this cavern, where you can lie hidden until the pursuit, which is sure to be raised, is over. Nobody but our three selves knows of this cavern, so you will be perfectly secure here until all danger is over. Then, when it is safe to venture forth, my brother and I will act as your guides, to take you back to Helpmakaar, or to wherever you may wish to go. Do you agree to that, '*Nkos* ? "

" Ay, that I do," returned Hugh heartily, " and I do not know how to thank you enough, Tambusa ; for upon my word, I do not know how else we could escape out of the country, my brother and I, even should I be successful in releasing him from his prison in the kraal. It is hardly likely that I shall be able to get him away without being discovered ; and even were I lucky enough to avoid detection, his absence would certainly be very quickly discovered, and of course we should be pursued. Moreover, had we nowhere to take refuge, we should soon be overtaken ; for we have no horses,

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and a small boy can go but slowly on foot over such country as this. Yes, Tambusa, I accept your offer ; and you have my most hearty thanks for the way in which you are assisting me. If I am successful I will see that you and Soye do not lose by what you are doing for me. But," he went on, rising to his feet, " now that you know where to find this kraal, had we not better be starting at once ? My heart turns to water at the thought that we may perhaps yet be too late ; for in the vision that you showed me Jack seemed to be in extreme danger."

" We will get away at once, 'Nkos," answered the Kafir, likewise rising to his feet. " I see that Soye has got the provisions ready, so there is nothing now to wait for. You have your gun that shoots six times, *Baas* ; you had better load it, and keep the other cartridges where you are able to get at them quickly—you may need them. Soye and I will take a shield and *iwwa* apiece, we shall not need any more, for if there is to be any fighting at all, it will be at close quarters. But, 'Nkos, I must warn you that we have a most dangerous journey before us, and we shall unfortunately be obliged to pass through a Zulu village before we can reach the kraal where the *unifaan* is. It is impossible to avoid doing so, for the place stands right in the entrance to a defile through which we must go, and there is only one way into it. True, we might reach Matayani—that being the name of the kraal—by going over the mountains, instead of through the pass ; but the journey would need a week, instead of a day—and you 'Nkos, know as well as I whether we can afford the time to do that. No ; we must go by the defile, and we must just trust to luck to be able to pass through the village unperceived, or if noticed, without

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being stopped. It would be better, I think, for you and Soye to go through first, as the Zulus might have their suspicions about an Arab who travels through the country attended by *two* Bantu servants ; while they might not notice anything peculiar if he only has one, for many Arabs have that. I will wait until I see that you and Soye are safely through, and will then follow after, for the Zulus know me well, *Baas* ; and will not think of detaining me. That is all, *Baas* ; and if you are ready we had better be starting, for the sun is now nearly two hands-breadths high in the sky, and the morning will soon be too hot for pleasant travel."

"Come along, then," returned Marchmont ; "the sooner we get away the better I shall like it." And calling to Soye, he marched out of the cavern, preceded by Tambusa, who went first to show the way, Soye bringing up the rear and carrying the provisions for the little expedition.

The *isanuisi*, after leaving the cavern, swung away to the right along a path which was very little better than a goat track, taking an opposite direction to that in which he had been when he met Hugh and Soye on the previous evening. Then he had been walking down from the heights to the level ground below, but now he continued to strike upward for some considerable time, reaching a greater altitude every moment, and penetrating, with every step he took, into more and more desolate and forbidding-looking country. Much to Hugh's satisfaction however, they saw no trace of any human being ; and indeed the country had too awesome an appearance for anyone to wish to linger very long in it. Rocky, barren hillsides, covered with short, brown, wiry grass, and thickly strewed with boulders, some no bigger

than a man's head, while others were as large as an ordinary hut, tiny streams meandering over gravelly beds, between high walls of rock, and a few ill-nourished shrubs, made up all the scenery; and it was of such a depressing character that Hugh was exceedingly thankful when at last Tambusa pointed to the crest of a hill about half a mile away and exclaimed:

"You see that hilltop, 'Nkos? Well, when we reach that we shall be able to look right down upon that village of which I told you, standing in the very entrance of the defile through which we shall be obliged to pass. We shall have a steep climb down, first of all however, before we reach the kraal; and we shall, unfortunately, be in full view of anybody who may be looking in our direction; but we must take our chance of that, put on a bold front, and trust to our snakes* to bring us through safely."

This was not very reassuring to Hugh, but anxiety for the safety of his brother, and his overmastering desire to reach him in the shortest possible time, excluded all other feelings; and rejoiced to hear that the first half of the dangerous journey was nearly accomplished, he pushed forward with renewed vigour, eager to reach the kraal and ascertain whether his good luck would really carry him through.

A few minutes later the little party arrived at the summit of the hill, and there, far below them, as Tambusa had said, lay the Zulu village which was the only obstacle in their path. It lay in the centre of a small green oasis surrounded by high rocks and great

* AUTHOR'S NOTE.—Every Zulu believes that he is guarded by a special spirit, which in time of danger exhibits itself to him in the form of a small snake. They very frequently carry a charm, consisting of a snake-skin, in the pouch which every Zulu wears suspended from the neck.

boulders, and Hugh at once saw that it would be impossible for anything living—except perhaps a bird—to reach the mouth of the defile, which he could now plainly see, without passing right through the kraal. Lying prone upon his stomach, and commanding the two natives to do the same, Hugh subjected the village to a long and careful scrutiny, as also the descent to it ; and after a quarter of an hour's close watching he was unable to detect any signs of people moving about the kraal. They were in all probability, he told himself, away hunting in the bush ; and it would therefore be as well to make an immediate start so as, if possible, to pass through the village and make their escape into the defile before any of the enemy should put in an appearance.

Marchmont therefore gave the signal, and in a moment the three men rose to their feet and began the steep climb down to the valley below. The track had practically ceased now, and the only method of progress was by leaping from rock to rock, sometimes jumping across chasms hundreds of feet deep, where one false step would have meant a horrible death on the rocks below ; sometimes hanging suspended by the tips of their fingers while they lowered themselves carefully down on to a ledge on the mountain-side, so narrow, perhaps, that there was barely room on it for one man alone, to say nothing of three. It was a journey fraught with every imaginable danger, and several times, on inadvertently looking downward, Hugh felt an almost irresistible impulse to hurl himself down on to the rocks below ; but Tambusa and Soye were both accustomed to this kind of work, and they kept a very close watch on their master, putting out their hands to steady him whenever they saw that there was any likelihood of his losing his balance and falling.

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So fully occupied were they in looking after the business on hand that they had no opportunity to keep a watch on the village, and therefore they failed to see something of the utmost importance to them. Just about the time when they had got about half-way down the perilous descent, and when Tambusa was, most fortunately for all concerned, out of sight behind a large rock, a couple of Zulus who were returning from a buck hunt happened to glance upward as they entered the kraal enclosure, and their eagle eyes immediately caught sight of the figures of Hugh and Soye, who were at the moment negotiating a particularly difficult and dangerous part of the descent.

"*Whau !* look there, Kobo," exclaimed one of them, excitedly, touching his companion's arm, "look above thee, *umfaan*. Do you see those two men creeping down the face of the cliff ? One of them is a Bantu, while the other is just like a *Jan*. But the *Jan* is no *Jan* at all, Kobo ; he is a '*mlungu* who is searching for the little boy Inzimbi carried off a little time ago. He and that servant of his killed the chief, Nongosa, and fled from the kraal with Nongosa's men in pursuit. The warriors ran them to earth near a large rock, which they surrounded, intending to starve the dogs out ; but in the night the '*mlungu* and the Bantu escaped, by magic, so it is said. They could not afterward be found, although search was everywhere made, and it was thought that the spirits of the mountains had devoured them. There they are however ; and they are walking right into our hands. Come along, Kobo, let us hurry away to warn the young men that there is a fine game afoot ; come quickly, lest the climbers look down and, perchance, see us. Above all, be silent ; for we must not alarm the prey. There will be good sport to-

night ; and to-morrow the *aasvogels* will have a fine feast."

So saying, the two Zulus, with one more look at the unconscious climbers, slipped rapidly across the enclosure, and vanished into the huts. The Englishman was walking right into a trap, but—he did not know it !

" Carefully now, Soye," exclaimed Hugh ; " another five minutes, and we shall be there, so make as little noise as possible. By Jove !" he continued, taking a careful look round the kraal, " we seem to be in luck ; there is not a soul to be seen. I should think, Tambusa, that you might come through with us, after all ; it will save time, and there seems to be no reason why we should not all go together."

" Ah, no, 'Nkos," replied the old warrior ; " never leave anything to chance where the Zulus are concerned. I shall not be long after you, when once I see that you have made the passage in safety ; but should anything unforeseen happen, it may perhaps make all the difference to have one of our party still at liberty. No, no ; you and Soye go first, 'Nkos ; I will wait here, where I can see everything that takes place, and if you are not molested I will soon follow after you."

Although Marchmont did not much like this running counter to his wishes on the part of the *isanuisi*, there was no time to argue the point, so with a shrug of his shoulders, he called to Soye, and the two men continued their descent into the valley, which they reached five minutes after leaving Tambusa, who was narrowly watching every step they took. It was about two hundred yards from the foot of the cliff to the kraal gate, and they soon reached the latter, finding it, singularly enough, unfastened ; a circumstance which both recollected a few hours afterward.

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With a quick push, Hugh flung the gate open, and marched inside, closely followed by Soye; and with furtive steps the two men started to run across the enclosure. They were among the huts in a second, and were threading their way between them when, suddenly, half a dozen Zulus dashed out from behind a hive shaped structure and flung themselves upon the two men. Soye was too much astonished to make any resistance, and like a man in a dream he allowed himself to be lashed up with a raw-hide rope, his eyes fairly starting from their sockets with terror. Hugh, on the contrary, fought like a demon; and for a moment it almost seemed as though he would break away from his would-be captors. He managed to draw his revolver, and pistoled three of the Zulus, breaking the head of a fourth with the butt of the weapon; but more of the enemy ran up, and the next thing that Tambusa saw, from his hiding-place, was the Englishman being felled to the earth by a savage blow from behind with a knob-kерrie.

Marchmont was then securely lashed, as Soye had been, with a *reim*, and the two were then dragged roughly away into one of the huts, where they were thrown upon the floor, the Zulus sitting round their prisoners until the white man began to show signs of recovery. Despite the violence of the blow which Hugh had received, he soon revived, his skull having doubtless been saved from fracture by the thick fez cap which he wore, and inside which he carried a pad of cloth soaked in water, as a protection from the fierce rays of the South African sun; and the first thing he saw when he open his eyes was a ring of savage faces glaring ferociously down into his own.

"*Bulani!*" exclaimed one of the Zulus, who seemed

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to be the head man, from the respect which the others showed him, "it is good! the '*mlungu*' has recovered his senses. You, 'Ngaka, lift him up, and let us hear what he has to say for himself before we——"

The pause was indescribably suggestive, and the young Englishman felt a shiver of something almost approaching fear as he was roughly hauled into a sitting posture and placed with his back against the wall.

"Now, '*mlungu*,' began the *induna* in an insolent tone, "what are you doing here, among my people? What are you doing here in disguise? We know that you are no Arab; you are nothing but one of the dogs who are trying to dethrone the Great Great One, Cetewayo, the Ruler of the Heavens. Explain to our satisfaction what you are doing in Zululand, and we will let you go, perchance with the loss of an eye, or a hand, still we will let you go eventually; but tell me lies, and you shall die the death that many others of your rash countrymen have died who have invaded our land."

Hugh was in something of a quandary, for whatever statement he might make, he felt sure that the savages would not believe him; nevertheless he gave a full account of the reasons which had induced him to enter the country, and concluded by asking them to set him at liberty so that he might go and rescue his brother.

As he concluded his recital the Zulus burst into a roar of raucous, derisive laughter, and the head man struck him with the back of his hand across the mouth, calling him a liar.

"All that you have told us is lies," he said. "We know the boy of whom you speak, but Inzimbi told us that he is his brother, although the *umfaan* seems to have little love for him. No, you are one of the *amasoja*,

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for I saw you at Isandhlwana ; you were the '*mlungu* who escaped with the news to *Kwa Jim* (Rorke's Drift), warning the *amasoja* that we were coming, and so robbing us of the fruits of victory. You have come to spy out the land ; but you shall never return with your knowledge, for you will die here in this kraal, die slowly and in dreadful torment, watching the approach of the death from which you cannot flee ; and your living bones shall be picked clean as you lie helpless. Then shall we see for ourselves whether the white men are as brave as it is said they are ; then shall we hear whether or not you will cry for mercy ; then shall we see how long you will be able to endure before going mad ! Take him away" he roared to the fiends who were waiting to do his bidding, "take him away, and put him to the torture of the ants."

Poor Hugh with difficulty restrained himself from shrieking aloud when he heard this sentence passed ; for although he had never actually witnessed the torture, he had heard most horrible descriptions of it from those who had, and his blood ran cold at the recollection of the dreadful stories which they had recounted. Faugh ! the sickening details all came vividly back to him and turned him quite sick and faint ; and when the black fiends laid hands upon him to carry him away to the place of execution he struggled so frantically that it took six of them to carry out the *induna's* orders.

But the odds were too great ; besides, to struggle served no good purpose, for it only exhausted him ; and at last he was thrown down in a corner of the enclosure near which, he at once noticed, were several ant-heaps. His clothes were then stripped off him, and his arms and legs stretched out to their full extent, being fastened down in that position by stout forked sticks firmly driven

into the ground. Then laughing with ferocious glee, the Zulus brought a pot of honey, and smeared the contents all over Marchmont's white skin. His mouth was next propped wide open by means of another stick, and a train of honey was laid therefrom to the nearest ant-hill ; after which one of the savages stirred up the nest with a stick in order to set the insects moving, so that they might the quicker come across the trail of honey.

It was by this time nearly dark, and the hour had arrived for the warriors to take their evening meal ; moreover, it would probably be some time before the ants found the honey trail, and following it up, came upon the victim ; therefore, with a chorus of fiendish laughter, and a volley of coarse jests, they left the two men to their fate—Soye having also been pinned down close to his master—and went away to get their food, intending to return later on, to hear the shrieks of the tortured victims announce the fact that the ants had begun their dreadful work.

Left alone, Hugh's thoughts naturally turned to the idea of escape, and he struggled with all his might to wrench one arm free so that he might withdraw the remaining pegs. He pulled and tugged until his muscles fairly cracked ; but all to no purpose—the Zulus knew their work, and had done it well ; there was no possibility of escape ; and the unfortunate man was at last obliged, being utterly exhausted, to lie still and wait for the first sharp prick of pain which should tell that the terrible torture had begun. Soye, staked out a little distance away, seemed to be in a state of semi-coma, for he made no attempt to get away, merely groaning heavily from time to time, as he imagined that he felt the ants beginning to swarm over him.

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Hugh has since said that the hour which followed was the most trying that he ever experienced ; and one can well believe him ; for his hair is snow-white, having changed from black to silver during that awful period of waiting for one of the most horrible deaths it is possible for a man to die. Inside, in the huts, he could now and again hear the loud laughter and shouts of the savages as they discussed the amusement which would be theirs as they watched the agonies of the prisoners when once the ants had begun their dreadful work ; and after a time Marchmont could almost have prayed that the torture might begin at once, in order that the awful suspense might be cut short and his sufferings brought to a more speedy end ; but the next moment he would remember his brother, and the dreadful perils to which the poor child was exposed. And then he would begin to struggle again, and would continue to strain at his bonds until his strength left him and he lay panting and exhausted.

But though by no exertion of strength could he break away from the stakes which held him so remorselessly down, he could move his head a little—sufficiently, in fact, to just catch a glimpse of the ant-hill which, after a time, he began to watch as though the movements of the ants had fascinated him. He saw them leave the heap and run aimlessly about until at length they found the honey upon which they at once began to feed with avidity, soon consuming the portion that lay nearest the ant-hill. In increasing numbers the insects continued to make their appearance, until the ground seemed alive with them, and their progress along the trail, slow as it was in reality, seemed to the helpless watcher to be rapid as that of an express train. Nearer and nearer they came, until at last they disappeared in the shadow

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of his body, and he momentarily expected to feel the first sharp nip of their terrible pincers. Then when he was steeling himself to endure in silence, he heard a quick patter of naked feet running across the enclosure, and his heart leaped as he heard a voice hisper in his ear : "Do not make a sound 'Nkos ; keep quiet for your life, for you may yet escape. It is I, Tambusa !"

CHAPTER XIII

“ WHERE IS MY BROTHER ? ”

HUGH could not reply, because of the gag in his mouth ; which circumstance was, as it turned out, an extremely fortunate one ; for the young man would otherwise most certainly have betrayed himself when he heard Tambusa's voice, so utterly shaken were his nerves at the prospect of a long-drawn-out, agonising death. As it was, his gasp of relief was almost loud enough to have reached the ears of the Zulus in the huts, had they not been engaged in their usual pastime of feasting and making merry in anticipation of the coming entertainment which was to be provided by the dying agonies of the unfortunate prisoners. Luckily, however, they had not observed the presence of Tambusa when the three men were climbing down the face of the cliff, and they therefore had no idea that either of the prisoners had any friends within some hundreds of miles.

After the first shock of surprise and relief, Hugh quickly pulled himself together, and his first words, after the faithful savage had removed the gag from his mouth, were to thank him for the devotion which he had shown, and to warn him that the Zulus in the huts might take it into their heads to put in an appearance at any moment, in order to see how the prisoners were getting on, and to ascertain how long it would probably

be before the sport might be expected to begin. Tambusa, however, was imbued with a much greater measure of courage than are most Kafirs, and showed no sign of perturbation at Marchmont's suggestion, but proceeded to sever the Englishman's bonds and to remove the forked sticks from his limbs, until, in a very few minutes, Hugh had the unspeakable satisfaction of finding himself once more a free man.

The *isanuisi* helped him to his feet and supported him for a few seconds, until Marchmont's stiffened limbs had somewhat recovered their power of movement; then when the young man was at last able to walk unassisted, Tambusa ran quickly and silently to where his brother was lying pegged out, looking with terror-stricken, beseeching eyes at his master, and began to release him in turn.

“It is all right, *Nkos*,” remarked Tambusa, in answer to an appeal from Hugh to be as quick as possible, “I do not think it is at all likely that the Amazulu will come out of their huts until the time for the first cry, for it is only after the ants have begun their work that the Children of the Heavens will care to look upon the scene. They know that directly the insects begin their attack no mortal man can endure the torture in silence, so they will wait for the time at which the torment has actually commenced before turning out to look at their victims. There now, Soye,” he continued as, having at last freed his brother, he dragged the latter to his feet, “lean on me for a few minutes, and rub your legs to coax the blood back into them; and pull yourself together a bit,” he added, for Soye's teeth were beginning to chatter with fear lest the Zulus should take it into their heads to come out before he could get away.

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Poor Soye, thus adjured, took a fresh grip upon his courage, clenched his teeth together, and began vigorously to rub his cold and stiffened legs, in which operation Hugh, now completely recovered, assisted, and a few minutes later the three men were ready to start. Marchmont now, however, found himself in a predicament, for he had of course been stripped stark naked before being pegged out, and it would be impossible for him to travel far without clothes. With Soye it was different, for all the clothing needed by the Kafirs was a *mucha*, or waistcloth ; and that he would be able to get almost anywhere, being able to make one himself out of the skin of the first animal that might be killed for food. Marchmont's revolver had also been taken from him at the same time as his clothes, and he was prepared to incur a great deal of danger to get the weapon back again, because it was almost indispensable to him.

He was tolerably certain that he recognised the hut into which his garments had been thrown after he was stripped, so, with a quick word to the two natives, he glided across the enclosure, looking like a ghost with the moonlight shining on his pale olive skin, and the next moment dashed into the hut in which he believed he would find his clothes and pistol.

His hasty action was within an ace of costing them all their lives, for there was unfortunately an occupant in the hut, a Zulu who was at that very moment engaged in gloating over the clothes and revolver which he already regarded as his own special property, looking upon them as the spoils of war. He had heard the swift patter of naked feet, but had taken no notice of it until Hugh dashed into the hut ; thinking, no doubt, that it was one of his own people coming to tell him that

the sport had commenced ; but directly he looked up he saw who the intruder was, and reached hurriedly for his stabbing-assegai. Luckily, however, the fellow did not think of shouting for assistance, and before he could reach the spear, Hugh was upon him.

The Zulu was a magnificent specimen of manhood, in the very prime of life ; and, moreover, he had not been staked out on the hard ground for several hours ; but his assailant was a desperate man, having even more than life at stake.

Swiftly as a serpent strikes, Hugh flew at the throat of the savage and gripped it with a grasp of iron before the fellow could cry out, and putting out all his strength, endeavoured to hurl him to the ground. To and fro, up and down the hut, reeled the two men, the Zulu himself striving in turn to seize the Englishman's wind-pipe before the latter's grip upon his own throat should strangle him ; and with eyes fast starting from his head, the native put out all his great strength in one supreme effort to hurl Marchmont from him.

Hugh, on his part, made a great effort to keep his footing, but he was a much lighter man than the Zulu, and strive as he might, he was lifted clean off the ground after which he was practically helpless in the grasp of the herculean savage. In a last despairing effort to avoid being thrown, he coiled his legs round those of the Zulu, endeavouring to hamper his movements, but he had nothing to give him a purchase, and the Zulu soon wrenched himself free. Hugh was now staring death in the face indeed, for he knew that unless a miracle took place he was a lost man ; his antagonist's hot breath, coming in great, choking gasps, seemed to scorch his face like a hot blast of wind from the desert, and he felt as though his ribs were cracking under the enormous

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pressure to which they were being subjected. Gradually his grasp upon the Zulu's throat became less and less powerful and in proportion as it did so, the man recovered his breath, and his strength increased. Presently the Zulu began to sway Marchmont's body to and fro with a quick, swinging movement, and Hugh knew that this was but the preliminary to being hurled clean over the Zulu's shoulder, in all probability to fall on the floor with a broken neck. Almost before the thought had time to pass through his head the young man was whirled round and upward, and he flew, like a stone, from a sling, right across the hut, luckily striking against a portion of the wall where there were no wooden beams.

The impact was nevertheless very severe, and as he staggered and fell to the ground the thought flashed through his brain that he was at last done for, since he had no strength for any more fighting; and the Zulu, after a momentary pause in which to recover his breath dashed across the hut to recover his broad-bladed assegai, which had been kicked aside when the struggle began.

But, even as the man stooped to pick up the weapon, a dark shadow fell across the floor of the hut, and Tambusa rushed in, closely followed by Soye. The two men had become anxious at Hugh's protracted absence, and had come to look for him. But when they reached the vicinity of the hut their quick ears had caught the sound of struggling, and like the brave fellows that they were, they had dashed in to the assistance of their master.

The *isanuisi* still retained his stabbing assegai, but he had given his knobkerrie to Soye, whose weapons had been taken from him when he was made prisoner; so

each armed with the weapon that he could use the best, the two men flew like leopards at Hugh's assailant. The latter was at that moment stooping for his own spear, but he never recovered it, which was a lucky thing, for otherwise the clash of steel upon steel would have been certain to have alarmed the other occupants of the kraal. Tambusa reached the Zulu with a single bound, and without uttering a word, drove his deadly *ixwa* deep into the fellow's side, while, a moment later, Soye's knobkerrie crashed its way into the doomed savages' skull, crushing it like an egg-shell.

For a brief moment the three survivors stood breathless in the middle of the hut, straining their ears to learn whether the commotion of the struggle had alarmed the other Zulus ; but the sounds of merriment still continued unabated in the huts, and much to their relief, the fugitives knew that, so far, at any rate, they had escaped detection. But every second was now of priceless value, for the natives might at any moment take it into their heads to go out and see how their prisoners were getting on ; and if they did so all would be irretrievably lost. Marchmont therefore hurried into his clothes as quickly as possible, shuddering violently when one of the garments felt warm and wet against his skin, for he knew that what he felt was the Zulu's life-blood. But it was no time for squeamishness, and taking a fresh grip on his quivering nerves, he completed his dressing, finding, to his great relief, that his revolver had not been tampered with. He therefore charged such of the chambers as were empty, and whispered to the two Kafirs that he was now ready to make a dash for liberty.

“Come along then, 'Nkos,” replied the *isanuisi*, stepping to the door of the hut and peering into the moon-

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light to see whether the coast was clear ; but the next moment he seized Marchmont's arm in a vice-like grip and drew him back into the shadows. "Listen, *Baas*," he said, his voice quivering with excitement, "listen ; the Amazulu have stopped their talking and are quarrelling about something. They will be certain now to come out into the open !"

"Then," replied Hugh, hoarsely, "let us make a run for it, before it is too late ; we are done for if they discover our absence now ; for they will post a guard at the gate."

"*Lungili*, 'Nkos ! away we go, then," answered Tambusa, suiting the action to the word ; and the three men streamed out of the hut and dashed at full speed but on tip-toe across the enclosure, toward the wooden gate that was set in the thorn fence. Their naked feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground as they bounded along, and in a moment they were scudding across the open, plainly distinguishable in the brilliant moonlight. Hugh prayed then, as he had never prayed in his life before, that there might be no dogs about ; and by a fortunate chance there were none ; the runners, however, expected every moment to hear the howl of rage from behind which should tell them that their flight had been discovered. But they had already covered fifty yards, and no alarm had been raised ; now the fifty yards had become a hundred, and another hundred would place them in comparative safety outside the gate. Another fifty, and still no sign of the enemy, and then—ah ! thank God ! at last the gate and freedom were reached.

Without waiting to open it, Tambusa, who was in the lead, cleared it with one magnificent bound, while Soye, who came next, did the same. Hugh also attempted

the leap, but he was unfortunately too close upon Soye's heels, consequently he caught his feet upon the wooden spikes on the top of the gate, and would have had a nasty fall had not the two natives, directly they touched the ground, wheeled round, intending to open the gate for their master. Marchmont fell right on top of them, and all crashed to the earth together. But no damage was done; and the next moment the fugitives had scrambled to their feet and were racing along the bush path for their lives.

Every moment they expected to hear the alarm raised, but second after second, minute after minute passed, and still they heard no sound; and at the end of half an hour the three men slowed down to a walk, knowing that they were now well beyond the range of pursuit. It was by this time about nine o'clock in the evening, so Hugh asked Tambusa whether it would be possible to reach Matayani before morning; for if it were not it would probably mean waiting eighteen hours or so for darkness again to fall before he could attempt the rescue of his brother, and he was much relieved to learn that by pushing on rapidly, they might manage to reach the village by midnight, so that he would be able at once to set about the task which lay close to his heart.

“Forward at top speed,” was therefore the word; and Soye infected with his master's eagerness, stepped along at a pace which taxed the latter's staying powers to their utmost. Ten o'clock still found them pacing up the defile, at the entrance of which stood the village where they had so miraculously escaped an awful death; but a quarter of an hour later the defile ended and they entered a belt of thickly wooded country which continued without a break until they came to an open

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space of grass-land, at the farther end of which could be seen a dark cluster of huts which Tambusa said was the kraal of Matayani.

Marchmont's first impulse, upon setting eyes on the place where Jack was imprisoned, was to dash forward and carry him away in the teeth of all opposition ; but a second thought showed him the impracticability of such a step, and he suffered himself to be guided by Tambusa's advice. That astute individual suggested that they should keep to the border of the forest which enclosed the open tract of country until they were near enough to the kraal to examine it thoroughly ; then after they had seen the coast was clear, Hugh could enter the kraal, leaving Soye and Tambusa outside, and endeavour to reach the hut in which Jack was confined. If he could do so unseen, he could easily free the boy and bring him away ; but should anything happen to Hugh—well, experience had already shown them the wisdom of having a reserve force at hand.

As no better plan seemed to suggest itself, Hugh resolved to follow Tambusa's advice, trusting to luck that no guards would be posted over his brother's hut. It was hardly likely that there would be, for Matayani was far in the interior of Zululand, and his captors knew that, even should the lad escape, a white boy could never evade recapture very long in that part of the country, for there was absolutely no haven of refuge to which he could fly. Slowly, therefore, the adventurers pushed forward, and half an hour later they had approached quite close to the thorn fence of the kraal ; but they still remained hidden in the friendly shade of the forest while they prosecuted their investigation.

"Good heavens !" gasped Hugh as his eyes fell upon the group of huts that constituted the village, "my

vision, or whatever I may call it, was absolutely correct. Tambusa,” he said, “you seem to possess marvellous powers, for the picture which you showed me in the cavern was exactly the same as this village appears, seen from this identical place. Why, I can plainly make out the hut in which I saw the *umfaan* in the vision—it is that hive-shaped one over there. God grant that I may not have arrived too late to save him!” he concluded under his breath.

It seemed as though the poor young man could not take his eyes from the hut, for he continued to gaze fixedly at it until he was recalled to himself by the voice of Tambusa remarking: “We are fortunate, after all, *'Nkos*; the village seems either quite asleep, or deserted. I have been watching very carefully ever since we arrived here, and I have not see a single soul. Neither are there any dogs about, or we should have heard them bark before now. It could not possibly be better for your attempt, *'Nkos*; and I strongly advise you to go at once; for one can never tell what may happen next in a Zulu village; there is no relying upon the Amazulu; and there is nothing to be gained by waiting.”

By a strong effort Marchmont withdrew his gaze from the hut and with shaking hands look out his revolver and carefully examined it—he might be obliged to fight for both his brother’s and his own life before another half-hour had passed. One more look he gave to the village, but everything remained silent as the tomb, and with a few words of caution and instruction to the natives, he stepped out of the shelter of the trees and made his way quickly toward the entrance of the kraal, which stood all unguarded, plainly before him in the moonlight.

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In a minute he had reached the gate, and the next moment had noiselessly lifted the latch and slipped through the enclosure, waiting for a few seconds in the shadow of the thorn fence to make sure that he had not disturbed anyone. The hut which Tambusa had showed him in the vision stood by itself at some little distance from the principal cluster of dwellings, and as Hugh was aware that the doors of the huts all faced toward each other, he took care to creep along the edge of the thorn fence, so as to keep at the back of the huts, and as much out of sight as possible ; and after creeping cautiously along for a few minutes, he found himself at the rear of the one in which he fondly believed his young brother was sleeping.

With his heart thumping so violently that he thought the sound of its throbbing must be loud enough to alarm everybody in the neighbourhood, Hugh rose silently to his feet and sped round the side of the hut to its door, pulled aside the reed mat at the entrance and looked inside.

For a few second he could see nothing of the interior, for his eyes were still dazzled by the white glare of the moonlight, but they presently became accustomed to the darkness and he was able to make out the objects in the hut. There was an iron cooking-pot just inside the doorway, and a low stool, such as the Zulus use for sitting upon, and in the corner a low European bedstead with something dark lying upon it.

"At last," thought Hugh, "I have found him!" and he dashed forward to the side of the bed, laying his hand tenderly upon the dark bundle. But the next moment he started back, all the blood seeming to leave his heart, *for the bed was empty*, the dark bundle which he had seen, and which he had believed to be the body of his sleeping

brother, proving to be nothing but a heap of Kafir blankets which had been carelessly thrown down upon the bed !

A wave of bitterest disappointment swept over Hugh, for he instinctively knew that, although he had not yet completely searched the hut, he should not find Jack there ; and it was with the utmost difficulty that he stifled the groan of anguish and despair that rose to his lips. To have come so far, to have undergone so many hardships, to have encountered and escaped so many dangers ; and then, at last not to find the lad whom he had so long sought—it was too hard ! With an aching heart the young Englishman, his eyes by this time accustomed to the darkness, searched the hut all over ; but as he had feared, without finding a trace of Jack. True, there were evidences that he had indeed occupied the hut, and that not very long ago, but it had manifestly been unoccupied for some hours ; and there was nothing to tell him where the boy now was, or whether he was still in the land of the living.

Like a man in a dream, Marchmont stumbled to the door of the hut and glanced, with vacant, unseeing eyes, over the moonlit kraal. There was, it seemed, nothing now to be done but to get back to the Kafirs and inform Tambusa of the failure of the expedition. The *isanuisi* was a shrewd man and a brave, and it was just possible that he, with his intimate knowledge of the Zulus and their country, might have some suggestion to offer, some idea of what had happened, some advice as to how next to proceed in the search.

Hugh was on the point of leaving the hut and walking away toward the kraal gate, careless now whether he were seen or not, when his wandering attention was suddenly arrested by the sight of a man who emerged quickly and

silently from one of the huts and began to walk with hurried strides toward the hut next to the one in which Marchmont himself was now concealed. At first Hugh imagined that the man was a Zulu, and the instinct of self-preservation caused him to step back into the shadow of the doorway in which he stood, from whence he could observe the man unperceived ; but a second glance showed him that the tall man was no savage, but a European dressed in hunting costume ; and with a thrill of fierce exultation and hate, he recognised the fellow as none other than the notorious gun-runner and kidnapper himself !

It was just possible then, that Jack was still alive, and Hugh made up his mind that he would know for certain before another quarter of an hour had passed. Quickly he whipped out his revolver and examined it carefully to see that it was fully loaded, then he watched Salvaterra until he disappeared into the adjoining hut, from which came a second afterward, the scratch of a match and a flicker of yellow light that showed the gun-runner had lighted either a lamp or a candle. Hugh then stepped out of his place of concealment into the open, standing in the moonlight until he felt sure that either Soye or Tambusa had seen him, when he raised his arm and beckoned for the Kafirs to come to his assistance. Another pause of a few seconds' duration in which to pull himself together, and Hugh ran swiftly to Salvaterra's hut, through the door of which he quickly glanced. The man was sitting before a table with his back to the door, and nothing could have been more in Hugh's favour. The Englishman silently pushed aside the reed mat with his revolver barrel, and bending low, crept into the hut, letting the curtain fall close behind him ; then with quick cautious strides he stepped up to

Salvaterra and clapping the revolver muzzle against the astounded man's ear, exclaimed :

“Now then, Salvaterra, hands up ! Quick ! Utter one call for help, one sound of any kind above a whisper and I will blow your brains out on the instant ! And now tell me, tell me quickly, *where is the boy* ? You infernal cowardly scoundrel, speak ! Where is Jack ?”

CHAPTER XIV

THE RAINMAKERS

FOR a moment Hugh thought that the gun-runner was about to faint through sheer fright, so white did the man's face become, and such was the terror shining in his eyes ; but Salvaterra was not made of such yielding material, and in a second he had gained a hold over himself again. He made no attempt to cry out, however, and held his arms at full length above his head, while he kept a wary eye upon Hugh's revolver ; but the man could not refrain from attempting to inflict some injury upon his enemy, although that injury could only be done with the tongue.

"Aha ! Captain Marchmont," he snarled, "so it is you, is it ? I wondered how long it would be before you got on my track, but I did not expect to find you masquerading in that disguise. I suppose you think that now you have run me to earth, it will be no difficult matter to make me disclose the whereabouts of your brother, eh ? But, my very excellent sir, you are most entirely mistaken if that is what you suppose ; for far from my being in your power, you are in mine, let me tell you. Oh yes, you need not prod me in the ear with that pistol in such an offensive manner, I am fully aware that you can shoot me dead, here and now, if you wish ; but what good will that do you, may I ask ? Once dead it will be out of my power to tell you what you want to

know ; and I do not think you yourself would live very long after firing that shot, for the Zulus would be here in next to no time if you were ill-advised enough to do so. No, Mr. Marchmont" he went on with a bitter sneer, "I have you in my power, for you dare not shoot ; and I have only to wait here long enough for my absence to be noticed, and for some of my friends, the savages, as you call them, to turn up to look for me ; it will then be 'good-bye' for you, my dear man, and the manner of your taking-off will not be very pleasant, for I will make a point of seeing to that myself.

"As for your precious brother—well, he was too much of a nuisance for me to be bothered with him any longer, so as a favourable opportunity occurred I availed myself of it to give him away. Oh, you fool!—you thick-headed fool—to think that you could do me an injury that I would not repay tenfold ! You little thought, when you so kindly handed me over to the police at Katana, that you were doing the worst day's work that you had ever done in your life—but so it was ; and I think I can see by your face that you are even now unhappy about it. Don't you wish, Mr. Captain, that you had seen fit to leave me alone ? No ? really ! I should have thought that you would have had your lesson. Now, my friend, let me tell you something. You can probably see for yourself by this time that you have made a mistake, but it is the last one that you will ever make. Why, oh why, were you so stupid as to come on this expedition alone ? If you had only had one or two companions the tables would have been turned, and the game would be in your hands. Let me explain, my sweet innocent, how you should have gone about the matter," he continued in a tone of biting sarcasm, all the time keeping a sharp eye on Hugh in the hope of

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being able to catch him off his guard. "If you had only had a couple of fellows you could have rushed this hut altogether, and while one of you 'held me up' with the pistol the others could have bound and gagged me. After that the rest would have been quite easy ; for I suppose that, had you tortured me—as I should have done you, had you been in my place and I in yours—I should have been compelled before long to tell you everything that you would like to know ; for pain is not very pleasant at any rate, much less when inflicted by an enemy. Do you see my point, captain ? Ah, I thought you would ; are you not now sorry that you had not a little more sense ?

"Now I may as well tell you what has happened to your brother, after which you may do your worst. I kept him a prisoner in this place for a few weeks, hoping that I might find some chance of presenting him to Cetewayo, who would have appreciated the gift. But it was getting to be rather a bore, looking after him, and the Zulus showed signs of beginning to make a pet of him, consequently there was a chance that he might be kept in the kraal for the remainder of his life ; I therefore decided not to be bothered with him any longer ; and as there had been an unusually long drought in these parts, *I handed him over to the rainmakers*. Aha ! so that touches you, does it ? I thought perhaps it would."

Poor Hugh ! It had indeed "touched" him, for he knew the fearful significance of the words. The rainmakers are a sect who, happily, are now almost extinct in Zululand ; but in the days when Cetewayo reigned they were a mighty power in the land. They were a sort of priesthood who, for a certain consideration, undertook to produce rain whenever the country stood in need of it ; and their mode of procedure was dreadful in the

extreme. Like the *isanuisi*, or witch-doctors, they "smelt out" victims, who were dragged away to a place where there was a small waterfall, and under this stream they were securely bound, being left there until they died in indescribable agony, after which, the rainmakers asserted, the drought would be broken. Needless to say the torture suffered by the unfortunate victim was terrible, as they sometimes lived two or three days before death finally released them from their sufferings.

Marchmont staggered as though someone had struck him a violent blow when he heard this fearful item of intelligence ; but he recovered himself before Salvaterra could take advantage of the opportunity to make his escape. Then seeing that Hugh's pistol was again pointing straight at his forehead, the gun-runner resumed ; still in the same bitterly ironical tones :

"You seem upset, Mr. Marchmont ; but I do not suppose that your little brother is dead yet, by any means ; indeed I should say that the torture has but recently commenced, for I only handed him over to the rainmakers half an hour ago ; so you see that, if you had not come alone, you might, even now, have rescued him. Oh ! the crass folly of you Englishmen ! I will even go so far as to tell you where he is, since there is no chance in the world of your being able to go to his rescue ; for you dare not go and leave me here ; and if you should my men will be here long before you can get away.

"You doubtless saw a certain large rock about half a mile beyond this village ? Well, close to that rock is a small waterfall, which you would most certainly see if you were there ; and under that waterfall I expect your brother is now bound. But my friends have evidently missed me, for I hear someone coming ; they will

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be here in a moment, and it will then be 'good-bye,' Mr. Captain. In fact I think it will be a very good plan to peg you down by the side of your brother ; you could then keep one another company in that case.

"Well, I must say 'au revoir,' captain, for here are my Zulus. *Oza lapa, Insiswa* (Come here, young men), he called in a low tone ; then : "Good heavens ! who are these ?" he added, with a gasp, as Tambusa and Soye filed silently into the hut.

"These," said Hugh, mockingly, "are the men whom you so strongly blamed me for not bringing with me, and who will now proceed to bind you after the manner you so kindly suggested. We shall not need to torture you, since you have already told me what I want to know ; but if you had not done so I have no doubt that that part also of your well-meant suggestion would have been followed."

"You—you devil !" snarled Salvaterra, flinching back from Hugh's revolver, now that he saw how the tables had been turned upon him. "And to think that I was such a consummate ass as not to have known that you would play me some trick or other ! By heavens ! I have more than half a mind to call out, and let you do your worst ; my Zulus would be here before you could turn round ; and I should at least have the satisfaction that your brother was still lingering in agony."

"I do not think I would, if I were you" said Hugh, quietly, glancing at the *isanuisi* ; "for I may inform you—since you cannot see for yourself—that one of my Kafirs is standing behind you with his assegai pointed at that part of your back which lies just between your shoulder-blades, so I should not need to attract attention to this hut by firing a shot ; cold steel is not nearly so noisy, and will cut the thread of your vile life just as

certainly. Now, Soye," he continued, turning to the native, "we must not waste any more time over this man, for he tells me that the *umfaan* is in great danger, and we must hurry to his assistance as quickly as possible. There is a coil of raw-hide rope in that corner, I think ; pull it out and lash the fellow up, while you, Tambusa stand by with your *ixwa*, and drive it through his body without hesitation if he attempts to resist, or if he opens his mouth to make the slightest sound."

Soye ran quickly to the place indicated, and fetched the rope, with which he at once proceeded to tie up Salvaterra, lashing his limbs together with such merciless tightness that the gun-runner was unable to repress the low moans of pain that rose to his lips, while at every sound he made, Tambusa dug the point of his assegai half an inch or so into the miserable wretch's body, as a gentle hint to him to be silent. As soon as the Kafir had finished, which he did in a short time, Hugh cut up some pieces of blanket taken from the roll lying on the bed, and with these he gagged the man so effectually that he was very nearly suffocated ; but the Englishman had decided to take no risks where such a wily scoundrel as Salvaterra was concerned, and he cared very little how severely the man suffered from the precautions that were being taken to secure him, seeing that he had offered injury to that which Hugh valued more than his own life.

At last the gun-runner lay upon the floor, swathed from head to foot like a mummy, about him the raw-hide rope, his mouth gagged with the strips of blanket which were stuffed inside it, and incapable of uttering even the slightest sound ; but his eyes, glaring ferociously into Marchmont's, spoke more eloquently than any words of the hatred which he felt.

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"Now then," said Hugh, when the business had been completed, "we must stow away the fellow where he will not be easily found, should his dear friends the Zulus take it into their heads to look for him. Ah ! I have it," he continued, triumphantly ; "bring the brute over here, Soye ; we will push him under the bed, unroll that bundle of blankets, let them fall over the sides and end of the bed, and leave him there ; it is not at all likely that the Zulus will search so thoroughly as to find him there, even if they look into the hut at all, which is not probable. There, push him under, boys, and let that blanket droop naturally over the bed. That's it ; I don't think it looks very much as though a man were concealed there, does it ? No. Very well, then, I think we will leave him, and get away on our errand, for as we all know, there is no time to waste." Then speaking to the gun-runner, he said : "Mr. Salvaterra, you told me a few minutes ago that I should probably be saying good-bye to you soon. Well, allow me to say it to you now. I know it is not the kind of farewell that you had in your mind, but it is perfectly satisfactory to me." And calling to the two natives, he went quietly to the door of the hut and looked out. The enclosure was empty, and there was no sign of any living thing in the kraal ; in fact Hugh would have given a good deal to have known for certain whether Salvaterra was "bluffing" when he said that the Zulus would be upon him if he made any sound ; for it seemed as though the place were absolutely tenantless. Then a thought flashed rapidly through his brain, making his heart throb madly in his throat : what if the entire population of Matayani had gone out to witness the white boy undergoing the "water torture" ? If that were indeed so it would perhaps be impossible for him to

rescue his brother until he had suffered unimaginable torment ; until, in fact, the Zulus had tired of the entertainment and gone away. It was an awful thought, and the sweat poured off his forehead at the fearful vision which he had conjured up. Truly, as he had said, there was no time to waste.

In a moment he had slipped out of the hut, having first taken the precaution to extinguish the light, and followed by Soye and Tambusa, dashed across the enclosure toward the gate by which he had entered the kraal, reaching and passing through it a minute later without any alarm having been raised. Once outside and out of sight from the kraal, he questioned Tambusa as to whether the latter knew the best way to the rock where was to be found the waterfall which Salvaterra had described, and the Kafir at once relieved Hugh's mind by saying that he knew the place well, and could guide him to it in a quarter of an hour ; starting off forthwith at such a rapid pace that Marchmont had some little difficulty in keeping up with him.

The period of fifteen minutes mentioned by Tambusa had not quite expired when the three men came to the end of the forest path along which they had been running, and the *isanuisi* quickly pulled up, holding up his hand for silence. Then Hugh and Soye crept forward cautiously to join him, and they saw that they had now reached the edge of the brushwood, and that in front of them stretched a tract of open grass-land. But what riveted Hugh's attention was the fact that, a couple of hundred yards away, rose a lofty cliff which stretched away to the northward as far as the eye could see ; while at the base of the cliff was a large rock which he had no difficulty in recognising as the one that Salvaterra had described to him. His brother then, was somewhere

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not very far away, if the gun-runner had spoken the truth ; and Marchmont with difficulty prevented himself from leaving the shelter of the trees and proceeding at once to search for him, regardless of the danger to which he would thus expose himself.

In a few seconds however, he had recovered his self-control, and proceeded carefully to examine the surrounding country, as Tambusa and his brother were doing, in order to ascertain whether the place was in reality as deserted as it appeared to be. For fully five minutes the men strained their eyes in the endeavour, but the brilliant moonlight threw such deep and puzzling shadows that it was a difficult matter to make out anything distinctly. Just as Hugh had decided to abandon the cover of the bush however, he fancied that he heard a sound, and turning to Tambusa, found that the *isanuisi* was listening with all his might.

"You heard that, Tambusa?" exclaimed Marchmont. "What in heaven's name, was it?" But before the Kafir had time to reply the same sound again broke on their ears, deeper in tone and more prolonged this time ; and Hugh at once recognised it as some sort of chant. It rose and fell upon the still night air with so weird and dismal an intonation, with so much suggestion of evil unspeakable, that he felt his hair rising slowly on his scalp while it seemed as though someone were pouring cold water down his spine ; in fact the chant seemed to be of almost too horrible a character to have proceeded from human throats at all, and the young Englishman's memory at once recalled some of the dreadful stories of evil spirits, wehr-wolves, and suchlike that had been gravely recounted to him by the Kafirs ; such creatures being popularly supposed to have their dwelling places in just such fearful spots as this.

He had, however, little time allowed him for such fancies, for just at that moment, cutting sharply through the sound of chanting, came a long-drawn unearthly shriek, which could only have issued from the lips of someone in the very extremity of mortal suffering ; and Hugh started as though he had been shot through the heart, for he plainly recognised the voice, broken though it was with agony, as that of his own brother.

"Oh horror !" he gasped, hoarsely, steadying himself by clutching Tambusa's shoulder ; "let us push forward at once—those fiends are torturing him ! Even if the Zulus are swarming there in hundreds I must try to rescue him ; I cannot remain here idly while that dear boy is suffering such torment. Come along, boys ; let us find his whereabouts before it is too late." And guided by another piercing shriek which at that moment rent the calm night air, he dashed out of the brushwood into the open, closely followed by his faithful henchmen, and ran at full speed toward the rock which he could now see plainly in front of him, sharply outlined against the silvery moonlight.

It was a madly rash thing to do ; because, for all that he knew to the contrary, the place might have been swarming with Zulus who had come out from Matayani to see the rare spectacle of a white boy tortured in which case he would of course have been at once overwhelmed by superior numbers and assegaied, with his servants ; while his brother would have indeed been irretrievably doomed ; for who would there then have been to rescue him ? But, as often happens, Fortune favoured the brave, and the three men reached the shadow of the rock without any sign of their presence having become known. Hugh could now hear the weird chanting which still continued, much more clearly ; and he paused

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for a few seconds, endeavouring to locate the direction from which it was proceeding. Presently it rose still louder and clearer, and at the same moment another piercing shriek burst from somewhere quite close at hand, while to his ears now came the dull muffled sound of a waterfall which he could hear splashing into a rock basin not very far away.

"Come along, Soye and Tambusa," he whispered hoarsely, as he began to clamber over the rocks, "I think I know in which direction to go now." And he drew his revolver from the pocket in the inside of his long Arab robe. They had not gone more than fifty yards, with the chanting growing ever louder in their ears when, right in front of him, but separated from him by a deep pool, Hugh caught the shimmer of a small stream of water tumbling down the face of the cliff, shining white in the clear light of the moon. That then was the waterfall, and somewhere under it, out of sight, his brother was being tormented! There was still no sign of the rainmakers themselves; and he was hoping that he might be fortunate enough to come upon them unawares otherwise, if they thought that there was a chance of Jack being rescued, they might kill him there and then, rather than allow him to escape and be recovered by his brother.

Hugh, finding that there was no other way of getting across the pool, was about to plunge into it and swim across when the *isanuisi* gripped him by the elbow and gasped hoarsely: "*Ingogo 'Nkos; ingogo; hikona 'ndhlela lapa* (crocodile, chief; crocodile; there is no passage that way)!" And the Englishman at once realised that he was standing on the verge of one of those sacred crocodile pools which have been responsible for so many dark tragedies in Zulu history. In fact, now that he

looked more closely, he could plainly discern the long, half-submerged shapes of several of the saurians floating on the surface of the water looking like so many half-submerged tree-trunks. But he also noticed that they seemed to be showing no excitement at his presence, from which he argued that they might, perhaps, have been recently fed; and the young man shuddered violently, for he knew well what species of food it was to which the crocodiles were accustomed; and he also knew that, unless he succeeded in rescuing his brother, his small body would surely find its last resting-place—there!

However, if the reptiles had indeed recently had a meal, it was just possible that they would not touch a man swimming across, provided that he did not waste too much time in the water; and as there was no time to be lost if he was again to see Jack alive, he raised his arms above his head, and with a long, clean dive plunged into the alligator-pool, Soye and Tambusa following him immediately afterwards, although they felt convinced that the whole party were diving to their death.

They did not create much commotion in making the plunge, but it was luckily sufficient to send the crocodiles scurrying to the bottom of the pool; and the next moment Hugh hurled himself, wet and dripping, out of the water on the further side of the pond. So far so good, he thought to himself, as he took his revolver out of his proof case; but the worst was still to come—the odds against him might be too great. But it was no good to hesitate, and the young man pushed forward over the rocks and scattered boulders as fast as he could.

Then, suddenly, he stopped with a gasp. The waterfall lay right in front of him, and there, underneath the falling stream, he recognised the naked body of a small

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boy whom he saw to be his brother. He was standing upright, although in a somewhat drooping attitude, and his fair curls hung down nearly to his shoulders. His arms and legs were securely fastened to iron rings set into the living rock, so that he could not move ; and his head was fixed precisely where a thin column of water fell directly upon it ; while from his lips there came at intervals the piercing shrieks which had directed his brother to the spot.

Gathered around him, in a semi-circle, were six stalwart rainmakers, naked as on the day that they were born, still singing that monotonous chant and raising their arms to heaven, evidently imploring the water-god to send them rain. But of any other living thing there was no trace. If then, thought Hugh, these were all the enemies he had to contend with, he might yet succeed in the attempt at rescue.

With a quick word to Tambusa and Soye, he cocked his revolver, and with a loud shout to his brother of : "Bear up a little longer laddie, it is I, Hugh, who am here to rescue you !" he dashed forward at the rainmakers, firing his revolver rapidly as he did so.

CHAPTER XV

RETRIBUTION

THE chanting ceased suddenly, and two of the rain-makers flung up their arms and sank to the earth, each with a .450 calibre revolver bullet through his body, while Soye, rushing in to close quarters, drove his broad-bladed assegai between the ribs of a third, killing him on the spot ; but Tambusa was, unfortunately, in too much of a hurry, for instead of waiting to use his weapon with his hand, he threw it, like an *umkonto*, as he ran forward, and in the excitement of the moment, missed.

For a few minutes the priests were taken aback by this furious and unexpected onslaught, but seeing that their assailants were only three in number, they quickly recovered their courage and leaped like bush-buck over the rocks to the place where they had laid down their clothes and their weapons. Hugh could easily have shot another man as the rainmakers darted forward to recover their spears, but he had already fired twice, and was reluctant to do so again lest the noise should attract the attention of other Zulus who might be in the vicinity—a not at all unlikely contingency. He shouted to Tambusa and Soye to keep the rainmakers at bay while he went to the assistance of his brother ; and the *isanuisi* having by this time recovered his *ixwa*, the two brothers took up their position to resist the charge

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of the Zulus and to prevent them from interfering with the Englishman while the latter went to free his young brother.

Jack, although by this time nearly delirious with the excruciating agony which he was enduring, was not too far gone to recognise his brother's voice, and he cried with all the strength of which he was capable : "Oh, Hugh, come and loose me quickly, or I shall die ; I have been here for hours, and I cannot bear it any longer."

Rejoiced as he was to again hear his small brother's voice, its manifest weakness and the fearful suffering which its plaintive accents betrayed, stirred Hugh to the heart ; and shouting words of encouragement, he drew his sheath knife and rushed across the uneven surface of the rock to set the child free. He was by Jack's side in less than a minute, and immediately set to work to cut through the thick thongs of raw-hide which bound him ; while the clash of spears and the hoarse cries of the combatants in his rear told him, all too plainly, that Soye and Tambusa were having their work cut out to keep the rainmakers at bay, and to prevent them from rushing in to dispatch their helpless prisoner, now that they saw a likelihood of his being snatched from their merciless grasp.

Hugh had already severed the raw-hide reim which bound his brother's arms, and was bending down to cut those which confined his ankles when Jack cried in a warning voice : "Look out, Hugh, those Zulus have got past Soye, and are close upon you !"

Like a madman Marchmont sprang to his feet, and picking up his revolver, discharged it at his foremost assailant, who fell shot through the brain ; but on pressing the trigger again the weapon refused to respond, and

Hugh realised, with despair gripping his heart, that the water must have somehow penetrated this particular cartridge while he was swimming the crocodile-pool. He pulled the trigger again, frantically, hoping that the next cartridge would not miss-fire, but unfortunately it did, and he had only time to dash the now useless pistol in the face of the leading-rainmaker, and again seize his sheath-knife, before the foremost man flung his arms round Marchmont's body, endeavouring to hold him fast, while he shouted to the second: "I have him; I have him fast; run in and slay the white boy before the Bantu can come up and stop us!"

But the fellow had reckoned without his hosts, he had not seen the strong steel blade which Hugh held in his hand, *and he never saw it*, for the next moment the Englishman had wrenched an arm free and buried the knife in the rainmaker's breast; and even before the Zulu's corpse had sunk to the ground he turned and sprang after the man who was already poisoning an *umkonto* in the very act of hurling it at the helpless boy. The man heard Hugh coming, and turned quickly, hurling the assegai full at the Englishman, but by the greatest good luck it missed and fell with a clatter on the rocks behind him. The rainmaker was then defenceless and with a hunted look in his eyes he turned and sought to escape by leaping from rock to rock in the direction of the crocodile-pool.

Marchmont knew however, that it would be absolutely fatal to allow the man to get away; for he would in that case be certain to carry the alarm throughout the whole country, thus rendering their escape an impossibility; he therefore dashed away in pursuit of his enemy, overtaking him at the edge of the pool. The fellow realised that escape was now impossible, and

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turned at bay, leaping at the Englishman like an enraged panther, and endeavouring to bear him down with the very violence of his assault. But Hugh had expected something of the sort, and was ready for him ; and as the Zulu flung out his right arm in an attempt to grip his throat, Hugh clasped both his long arms round the man's body and strove to hurl him to the earth.

The Zulu was, however, a man in the prime of life ; his ascetic mode of living had toughened him until all his muscles were as strong as steel ropes ; and Hugh at once realised that the task before him was not at all an easy one. To and fro the fighters stumbled, each endeavouring to get a master-grip upon the other, but neither of them succeeding because of the strength and agility of his opponent. As they whirled round and round, hither and thither, Hugh's eyes instinctively sought the spot where his brother was lying bound, and his heart leaped with exultation as he saw that his two faithful Kafirs were busily engaged in severing the bonds which still confined the lad's ankles. The sight put new life into him, and he threw the whole of his strength into the attempt to get rid of his opponent, having at last the satisfaction of seeing that the latter was growing perceptibly weaker. "One more effort," he thought, "and the man is done for ; and I must finish him quickly too, or we shall have the Matayani Zulus upon our track before we can make our escape."

The fighters were very near the edge of the pool, now, and as they reeled wildly about Hugh's eyes fell upon the surface of the water, and he noticed that the crocodiles were betraying intense interest in the struggle. It was quite evident, even to the meanest intelligence, that they

were eagerly anticipating a meal, and in a moment the Englishman made up his mind that that would be the best way to get rid of his adversary. He also noticed that there was a small projection of rock about a couple of yards away, and he saw that, if he could drive the Zulu up to it, that tiny projection would probably prove of great service ; so he exerted every ounce of his remaining strength, and gradually forced the rain-maker backward until the heels of the latter were not six inches from the rock. Then bracing himself afresh for a final effort, he rushed the man suddenly backward, dashing his fist savagely in his face as he did so. Unable to resist the attack, the man made a quick backward movement, with the object of evading its violence ; but unfortunately for him, he did not see the trap which his assailant had laid for him, and catching both his heels upon the rock, he fell with a crash upon his back, endeavouring to roll out of his enemy's reach as he touched the ground. The bank, however, sloped rapidly down to the surface of the pond at that particular spot, and before the unhappy rainmaker realised where he was, or what was happening, he found himself rolling headlong down the slope, utterly unable to save himself from the dreadful doom which he now saw staring him in the face.

As Hugh straightened himself up after flinging the Zulu away from him, he saw that the crocodiles were all rushing madly to the edge of the pool where the savage would strike the water, and he instinctively turned his eyes away from the dreadful sight which he knew would instantly follow ; but although he did not actually behold the tragedy, his ears told him only too plainly what was happening, and his very soul sickened within him at what he heard.

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But this was no time to give way to horror, dreadful as might have been the incident which inspired it, therefore quickly pulling himself together, Hugh turned and ran toward the spot where Soye and Tambusa, having released Jack, were rubbing the poor boy's wrists and ankles in the endeavour to restore the circulation in them. The last of the rainmakers having now been effectually disposed of, Marchmont was free to turn his attention to his small brother ; and he was both shocked and infuriated to discover that, comparatively brief as had been the lad's exposure to the torment, his small person already bore only too visible traces of it ; although he hoped that, with proper care and attention, these might disappear in the course of time, leaving no ill effects behind.

He sickened and choked as he realised, more vividly than ever, how dreadfully the poor boy must have suffered ; yet he was at the same time profoundly thankful that by a fortunate chance Jack still retained his senses sufficiently to recognise his brother and to understand that Hugh was going to do his best to get him safely out of the country and home again, for had Jack been delirious it would have been almost impossible to save him, since he would have inevitably betrayed by his cries the very people who were risking all they possessed to save his young life.

Nearly a quarter of an hour elapsed before Jack recovered the use of his hands and feet, and his brother suffered agonies of apprehension lest, by some mischance, fortune should now cease smiling, and his brother be even yet snatched away from him again ; for it seemed almost absurd to hope that that night's work could long remain undiscovered. Salva-terra might have been found by this time ; and the

infuriated Zulus might, even at this moment, be approaching to take vengeance upon the presumptuous white man who had dared to ill-treat the gun-runner, and still worse, to exterminate the entire priesthood of Matayani in the persons of the six rainmakers.

But minute after minute passed, with no untoward sound breaking the stillness of that lovely moonlit night, and at last Jack declared himself able to walk if they wished to start. Hugh had already stripped himself of a part of his long Arab robe in order to provide a covering for his brother's body ; but the child had no shoes, and it was impossible for him to walk a dozen yards over the rough ground without getting his feet cut to pieces. The three men had therefore to cast about them to see by what means they could contrive to provide some sort of footgear for the youngster, and at length Soye hit upon the solution of the difficulty ; he cut his waistcloth in half and bound the pieces round the boy's feet by means of the raw-hide thongs which, such a short time ago, had served to confine him under that awful waterfall.

This arranged, the quartette, looking altogether disreputable, set off for Matayani as fast as their weary legs could carry them, in order to make the passage of that village during the hours of darkness, for they knew that it would be impossible to get through in daylight, and if they should be compelled to hide in the bush until the next night it was more than probable that they would be discovered and taken. Before leaving the place however, Soye and his brother took the precaution to throw the remaining bodies of the rainmakers into the crocodile-pool, so as to leave as few traces as possible of the work which had been done there. The Kafirs selected such weapons as they required from those

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which had belonged to the Zulus, and then flung the remainder after their owners, who, judging from the snapping of jaws and the swishing of water in the pond, were already providing a meal for the reptiles which they themselves had trained to expect such gruesome food.

At last the revolting task was finished, and all traces of the recent struggle for life being now obliterated, the fugitives crossed the small tract of grass-land which lay between the cliffs and the forest and plunged into the friendly shelter of the bush, pushing forward at the best speed of which they were capable, Tambusa in front, leading the way, Hugh in the middle half leading, half carrying Jack, and Soye bringing up the rear, keeping a sharp lookout, both behind and on either side, for possible pursuers.

But Fortune still favoured them, and they arrived safely at Matayani a little before three o'clock in the morning, finding to their astonishment, that there were still no traces of inhabitants ; so that Marchmont began to hope that the Zulus were away on a hunting expedition. He nevertheless made a long and careful survey of the kraal before leaving the forest, and sent Tambusa forward to reconnoitre, telling him not to signal the party to advance until he was certain that there was no one about. The *isanuisi* therefore slipped silently away, and a few minutes afterward was to be seen cautiously entering the hut where, a few hours before, they had made a prisoner of the gun-runner. Then the Kafir appeared once more, made a careful circuit of the whole enclosure, and waved his hand as a signal that the other three might safely approach.

Accordingly the little party came out of the forest,

and a few seconds later had reached the comparative safety of Salvaterra's hut, where Tambusa reported that the kraal was undoubtedly deserted for the moment, though where its inhabitants might be it was impossible to say. To Hugh's great relief he found that Jack's clothes and shoes were still in the hut, and he at once helped the boy to put them on. Then leaving him to rest quietly in a corner of the hut, Marchmont turned to Soye and Tambusa and said : "It is true that there may be nobody about at present, but we cannot tell at what moment the Zulus may return, and it would be well for us to show ourselves as little as possible. Moreover," he added, "we have now to decide how to deal with this scoundrel who, besides being a traitor to his colour, does not scorn to lift his hand against a defenceless child. We dare not leave the fellow here ; for directly his friends return they will look for him, and as soon as they find him he will put them on our track. No, it is manifestly impossible to leave him here ; we must put him somewhere where he will be found eventually—for I cannot bring myself to destroy him in cold blood—so that he may not starve to death, but it must be somewhere where the Zulus will not find him until we are far enough away to be beyond all danger of pursuit. However, pull him out from under the bed, Tambusa ; take the gag out of his mouth ; and let us hear what he has to say for himself ; but should he attempt to call for help, or raise the alarm, drive your assagai through him without any hesitation. Now, Soye, give Tambusa a helping hand."

With broad grins on their faces, the Kafirs hauled the unhappy man out from underneath the bed, and set him roughly down upon a chair, Soye wrenching the gag out of his mouth while Tambusa stood close behind him

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with poised assegai, ready to deal the fatal thrust, should the man show the least sign of calling out.

"Now, you infernal blackguard and scoundrel," exclaimed Hugh, "what have you to say for yourself? Thanks to your timely information, and your hints as to how I ought to proceed, I have succeeded in rescuing my brother from those familiars of yours, the rain-makers; and I intend, moreover, to get him safely across the border into Natal, where he will be out of danger from such ruffians as yourself; but in order to do that I must be secure from interruption by you, and at present I do not quite see how to make sure of your non-interference with my plans, except by killing you. Have you any reason to advance why I should not put an end to your career, just as you so kindly proposed doing to my brother and myself?"

While Marchmont was speaking, the miserable man kept his eyes fixed upon Hugh's as though unable to remove them, and he must have read the young Englishman's relentless determination to kill him like a dog rather than allow him to in any way interfere with his plans. The fellow was standing on the brink of eternity—and he knew it!

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Captain Marchmont," he moaned, "do not kill me! I will do anything in my power to help you to escape; I will tell you anything that you may wish to know; and I am deeply sorry for having treated your brother in the way I did. Only tell me what I can do to assist you, and I will do it; but do not kill me—I am not ready to die," he ended despairingly.

"You never spoke a truer word than that in your life," replied Hugh sternly. "Still, after all that you have done I cannot trust you; you would at once

unhesitatingly betray me to your friends the Zulus if you thought you could do so with safety to yourself. You dog," he continued, suddenly catching the vicious glare in Salvaterra's eyes, "you know that even at this moment your mind is plotting treachery ! Tell me at once, where are the inhabitants of this kraal ?"

"By the heaven above us," answered the blasphemous and perjured scoundrel, "I am not thinking any treachery ; and I will tell you truthfully where the Matayani Zulus now are. They all went away this morning in order to take part in a great '*tuyala* drinking' which is being held at a village called N'Qubisa, twenty miles to the northward ; and they cannot possibly get back here before midday to-morrow ; so you will have ample opportunity to make your escape and get beyond the reach of pursuit before they return. By all that I hold sacred I am telling you the truth !"

Hugh looked long and searchingly in the man's face, and before the Englishman's earnest gaze Salvaterra was obliged to drop his eyes lest the other should read in their false depths the treachery that he was meditating. But the young man had acquired in the hard school of experience a very intimate knowledge of human nature, and he knew, as well as the gun-runner himself did, that the fellow was not to be trusted.

"I do not believe you," he said ; "and because I cannot trust you I shall be obliged to deal with you in my own way after all. What do you think you hear ?" he went on sharply, seeing that the man had inclined his head to one side and was evidently listening for some sound. "Soye, go outside at once and see whether you can hear anything ; the Zulus may be returning at this moment ; for this fellow is lying I know, when he says that they will not be back for another nine hours."

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Salvaterra made no reply, but sat still in his chair, glaring at Marchmont with the vicious eyes of a crushed snake ; while Soye, snatching up an assegai, darted out of the hut and listened intently. He remained there for about half a minute, listening with all his ears and with his eyes turned to the northward, fearing that in that direction he might catch sight of the Zulus returning from N'Qubisa. But there was no sound of tramping feet ; no sign of any living thing ; and the Kafir was on the point of re-entering the hut when his eyes fell upon the torture-rock, which shewed dimly, nearly half a mile away, in the moonlight ; and a slow smile crossed his lips. Some idea had evidently entered his mind, some thought which gave him a great deal of pleasure, and he hurriedly entered the hut again, chuckling as he pushed the reed curtain aside.

"No, 'Nkos" he said, "there is no sign of the Zulus at present ; but there is no knowing when they may return ; and it would be as well for us to get this *'mlungu* out of the way before they come. You do not know how to deal with him, master, but I do," went on Soye. "If you will but give me permission, I can take him away to a place where he will be perfectly safe from observation until we are able to make our escape ; and he will not be able to get away to interrupt us."

"That's good news, Soye," replied his master, unsuspiciously. "Have you then thought of some secure place where he can be hidden ? If you have, then take him away, by all means, as you propose. But," he added, knowing the Kafir's character, "you are not to kill him, unless he becomes obstreperous and refuses to do as he is told ; and moreover, you are not to tie him up in some place where it will be impossible for his

friends to find him ; I will not have the man starved to death, although he would have doomed me and mine to a much more dreadful fate than starvation."

"No, 'Nkos," answered the Kafir, slyly, "I won't kill him—unless he misbehaves ; and I will put him where his friends will be sure to find him before he dies of hunger ; oh, yes, they will find him, without a doubt !" he concluded with a laugh, which made Salvaterra shudder with fear, although Hugh, with his mind intent upon something else, did not notice the significance of it.

"Very well, then," said Marchmont, "take him away ; and be quick about the job, for we have no time to waste ; if the *umfaan* is ready to proceed before you come back I shall push forward along the path by which we reached Matayani—you will be easily able to overtake us ; if he is not, I shall, of course, wait for you here. You had better gag this man and so make sure that he will not raise an alarm, but cut his legs loose and let him walk ; he cannot do any harm, since he has his hands tied ; and he cannot run very far or fast either with his arms lashed behind him."

As soon as heard this sentence pronounced and knew that he was to be handed over to the care and tender mercies of Soye, the gun-runner's eyes dilated with terror, and he opened his mouth to speak ; but with a significant glance at his brother, the Kafir thrust in the gag before Salvaterra could utter a word ; and as Hugh was not looking in his direction at the moment he did not see the frenzied look of appeal which the miserable wretch threw towards him. Soye then cut loose Salvaterra's leg-lashings and helped him to his feet by a somewhat suggestive application of the point of his assegai ; then taking care to keep between the gun-

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runner and Hugh, the Kafir pushed him out of the hut and directed his steps toward the torture-rock, while Marchmont called after him from the hut, exhorting him not to be long.

The Kafir spoke no word to his captive until he was half-way to the rock ; then he gripped Salvaterra by the shoulder and hissed into his ear : "Do you know what I am going to do to you, 'mlungu ? Look yonder ; do you see that rock ? Do you remember that you doomed my master's brother to perish under that waterfall ? You do, of course. Well, you are going to die in the same way. I promised the *Inkos* that I would not kill you, and I am not going to do so ; I shall merely leave you under the water ; and if you choose to die it will not be my fault. I also said that I would put you where your friends will have no difficulty in finding you ; and they will be easily able to do that—if *they should happen to pass that way*. But it may be some time before they do so, and—well, I do not think that you will trouble us any longer, 'mlungu !"

Salvaterra's efforts to free his mouth from the gag in order to implore mercy were pitiful in the extreme and his face turned almost black with the violence of his struggles. He made curious little dashes hither and thither in unavailing attempts to escape from his iron-hearted custodian. But he could not run very fast, since his arms were lashed behind him ; and Soye was ever on his heels, goading him back into the right path with the cruel point of his assegai.

By the time that the two men reached the torture-rock, Salvaterra was nearly mad with fear, but Soye the inexorable observed with calm indifference the wildly-rolling eyes and their voiceless appeal for mercy. He lashed Salvaterra securely under the water-drip ; looked

carefully to see that unaided escape was impossible ; and then, with a mocking laugh and a final wave of the hand, left the miserable wretch to the fate to which he had so callously doomed a helpless child of his own colour, who had never done him any harm.

CHAPTER XVI

PURSUED

As soon as Soye had disappeared, taking his unhappy prisoner to a "place where he would not be likely to interfere with their plans of escape," Hugh went across to the corner where his brother was lying in a kind of heavy stupor, and gently shook the sleeping lad by the shoulder ; but so worn out was he after his terrible experience at the hands of the rainmakers that he merely turned over, with a sigh of weariness, and a moan, and continued to slumber.

His brother now perceived more fully the ravages which torture had caused in the young face ; and as he looked at the sore, inflamed head, where the water had been relentlessly impinging for so many dreadful minutes of agony, he shook his fist in the direction in which Soye had walked away with the prisoner, and regretted that the restraints of civilisation did not permit him to deal with Salvaterra in the manner which that scoundrel so richly deserved.

There was no time for useless regrets however, and necessity knowing no law, he bent down once more, and after several seconds of steady shaking, managed at last to awaken the boy ; who, directly he realised that he was now indeed safe, fell into his brother's arms with a choking little inarticulate cry, and lay there sobbing

with relief and thankfulness that he was no longer in the hands of the savages.

Hugh comforted the poor child as well as he could ; but it was nearly half an hour before he finally succeeded in restoring the little fellow to his normal self-possession ; and neither of them had any idea of the length of time that had elapsed until Marchmont was once more recalled to earth by hearing a hurried knocking at the wall of the hut. In a moment his now preternaturally acute senses told him that there was danger at hand—he was convinced of the fact by the quick, nervous character of the knocking—and darting to the door of the hut, he pulled aside the reed curtain and called softly into the darkness : “ Who is there ? Is that you, Soye ? Is anything the matter ? ”

For the time being Hugh had so entirely forgotten the existence of the faithful *isanuisi*, to whose assistance he was so much indebted for the recovery of Jack, that he started violently on hearing, close to his ear, a quick hissing whisper : “ It is I, Tambusa, Soye has not yet come back, and I am beginning to fear that he will never return, for a large body of men is coming this way ; I can hear them distinctly ; and I very much fear, *Inkos*, that it is the hunting party of Zulus who are returning to Matayani. If it is so they will almost certainly have caught my poor brother, and will guess that we are here ; for they will know that he would never have come here by himself. What are we to do, *Baas* ? I can hear them singing now ; and they cannot be more than a quarter of a mile away.”

“ Good heavens ! ” exclaimed Hugh, “ if that is indeed so I fear that we are lost, for it would be impossible for us to leave the kraal now without being seen. Well, we had better retreat to Salvaterra’s hut ; that

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is stronger than this, and consequently more capable of being defended ; and we must make a stand there for as long as we can. Perhaps we may be able to beat them off and make our escape. But," he muttered to himself under his breath, "I fear that we have come to the end of our tether at last. Come along, Jack" he continued speaking aloud, "let us get across to the other hut before the Zulus get near enough to see us ; it is just possible that they may not have come across Soye ; and if they have not they will of course be unaware that we are here ; at any rate we will not give up hope just yet."

"No, certainly we will not," agreed Jack, bravely ; "I have still that little revolver you gave me, Hugh, and I can help you to keep away the enemy ; but you will not let them take me again, will you ?"

"No, no laddie," replied Hugh, hoarsely, "I promise you that. But I am very glad you have that revolver, for I have not very much ammunition left for mine, and yours is a deadly little weapon at short range. Now come along to the other hut ; the Zulus will be in sight in a few minutes."

Then, seizing his brother's hand, Marchmont darted across the enclosure toward Salvaterra's hut, which they reached before the Zulus came in sight of the kraal ; and Tambusa having followed them inside, Hugh dropped the mat into position in front of the door, and set about making his preparations for the defence of the hut. There was unfortunately scarcely anything to be done, for there was but little furniture in the structure with which they could barricade the place ; and Hugh knew that almost the first act of the enemy would be to throw assegais to which blazing grass had been fastened, thus setting fire to the thatch and burning them out in a very few minutes.

The Englishman was in the very act of pushing the camp bedstead across the floor in order to put it in front of the door when Tambusa, who had paused for a moment in his preparations, suddenly remarked : "Wait a bit, *Inkos* ; wait a bit before you move any of the furniture in the *kwa* ; I have been listening to the chant which the Zulus are singing, and it is not a war song, as I thought at first, but merely a description of the successes they have had in hunting. That means that they have not come across my brother, and consequently they cannot have any inkling, as yet, that we are here. They are coming along very slowly, too, whereas, if we were going to be attacked, they would advance swiftly and silently, so as to take us unawares. No, *Baas* ; depend upon it, Soye is still free, and we may escape even now if we are careful what we are about. Let me come to the door, *Inkos*, so that I may peep through a crack in the matting and observe their movements when they enter the kraal."

Tambusa's remarks had rekindled the spark of hope in the breasts of the two whites, and Hugh's fingers were perfectly steady as he charged both his own and his brother's revolver ; then, placing his arm round the boy, he sat down on the bed, listening intently to the sound of the approaching Zulus. The savages had arrived to within a few yards of the kraal gates when Tambusa suddenly sprang to his feet and exclaimed excitedly : "They evidently expected nothing, '*Nkos* ; but they are almost certain to visit this hut in order to tell Inzimbi the result of their hunting, and to give him his share of the spoil. I have an idea, *Baas*, which, although desperate, may yet save us all. As I say, they are certain to come here, and if they do, *you must impersonate Inzimbi* ; it is dark in the *kwa*, so it should

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not be a very difficult task ; and in order to prevent them from bringing a light, you must feign to be ill, at the same time asking them not to disturb you to-night as you wish to sleep. The boy you must hide under the bed, in the same way that you did Inzimbi, while I will hide myself behind the row of Inzimbi's clothes which hang against the wall. Quick, *Inkos*," he continued, seeing that Hugh was somewhat doubtful as to the success of the plan, "slip off those clothes, and put on this suit of Inzimbi's ; you will then resemble him quite nearly enough to deceive the Amazulu in the darkness, especially if you put on this broad-brimmed hat and pull it well down over your eyes. It is our only chance, and I am almost certain that it will succeed, if we are careful. I will hide close to the door, so that, should anything unforeseen occur, I may be able to kill as many as possible of the enemy before they give the alarm."

While Tambusa was speaking Hugh rapidly turned over the proposal in his mind, and by the time that the *isanuisi* had concluded, he had resolved to adopt the desperate course suggested by the man. He therefore told Jack to crawl under the bed, and as soon as the child had disappeared from view he pulled the blankets over until their edges rested on the floor, thus completely hiding the boy from a casual glance. Then he flung off his well-worn Arab costume and quickly attired himself in a suit of Salvaterra's, consisting of a shooting-jacket, a pair of riding-breeches, and a pair of top-boots, finishing up by putting on one of the gun-runner's broad-brimmed felt hats, and cramming it down over his eyes.

The *isanuisi* glanced critically over his master's figure, and declared that, in the dim light of the hut, the disguise was perfect, and that, if he were only careful, the

Zulus would never penetrate the secret. He then ensconced himself snugly behind the row of clothes which hung from pegs in a dark corner, and grasping a broad-bladed assegai in his right hand, prepared for the next act in this tragi-comedy ; while Hugh, throwing himself down on the bed, with his revolver ready for action, resolved to play his part in the game of life and death.

The ensuing period of inaction was one of the most trying experiences to which Hugh had ever been subjected, and it seemed to him as though the end would never come. Outside, in the enclosure, he could hear the Zulus laughing, singing, and talking, but not one of them showed any signs of approaching the hut ; and it really began to appear at last as though the savages did not intend to sleep at all that night, but meant to continue carousing and feasting on the spoil which they had brought back from the hunt until daybreak, now not so very far distant ; in which case all Hugh's plans would certainly be ruined. The occupants of the hut could plainly hear everything that was being said outside, and Hugh thanked heaven many a time that Jack was too tired to hear what the Zulus were talking about ; and when, on one occasion, the young man heard them jesting horribly over the tortures they supposed the white boy to be even then undergoing, he felt inclined to throw discretion to the winds and dash out among them in the attempt to destroy as many of the black-skinned fiends as he could before being himself killed.

He was restrained from any such rash proceeding however, by the knowledge that the boy whom he had gone through so much danger to rescue, was still in the most imminent peril ; and at last, about an hour before

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daybreak, the trying period of inaction came to an end. For some time past the noise of the shouting and singing had been growing less and less, and Marchmont was beginning to think that he might perhaps, after all, escape a visit, when he heard one of the Zulus shout, in a thick, drunken voice: "Ho! Mompela, where is Inzimbi? We have forgotten all about him and his share of the spoil; go to his *kwa* and tell him to come out, so that he may choose what he requires." There was a grunt of assent from the man addressed, followed by a prodigious yawn, and Marchmont heard him stumble to his feet and come reeling towards the hut, having evidently drunk far too much *tuyala*, and he pulled himself together for the ordeal which he knew he was presently to undergo. At the same instant a rustle from underneath the bed, and a deep-drawn breath from the corner where Tambusa had hidden himself advised him that both Jack and the *isanuisi* had heard the Zulu coming, and were prepared for any eventuality. A moment later the savage reeled against the hut with a thud, and, stooping down, dragged aside the reed mat which covered the door, and entered.

"*Whau!* Inzimbi, are you there?" he hiccupped walking toward the bed. "We have returned from the hunt, and Umhlala has sent me to tell you to come out and choose what meat you want; he also wishes to know whether the rainmakers think that the sacrifice will be successful in breaking the drought. Wake up, '*mlungu*,'" he continued, shaking Hugh roughly, for the Englishman had decided, at the last moment, to pretend to be fast asleep, in the hope that the fellow might decide not to try to wake him.

"Well, what is it?" growled Hugh, in what was, under the circumstances, a very fair imitation of

Salvaterra's voice ; "go away, whoever you are, I am too tired to come out to-night."

The Zulu, however, was not to be put off, and he repeated his question, shaking Hugh still more roughly as he did so. "I am Dubuza," he said ; "and the *induna*, Umhlala wants you to go out to him at once."

"But I am too tired to get up to-night," protested Hugh ; "I will see Umhlala in the morning. Go away, now, and leave me in peace, for it is a fool's trick to wake me up in the middle of the night for such a purpose."

Whether it was that Dubuza's suspicions were aroused by Hugh's unwillingness to obey the orders of Umhlala, or whether the man noticed some subtle change in the voice, Marchmont never knew, but, without saying anything further, the Zulu walked quickly toward the door of the hut, and with a swift movement, tore down the curtain, allowing the moonlight to stream into the interior of the hut, where it shone full upon Hugh's white, upturned face. For a moment Dubuza hesitated, seeing that something was wrong, but, not knowing quite what to make of it he turned to run out of the hut, and as he did so, a glimmer of steel showed for a moment in the corner where Tambusa was concealed. At the critical moment, however, the Zulu changed his mind and, reeling back to Hugh's bed, and thrusting his face close to the Englishman's, said, in a low, intense voice : "Who are you ? You are not Inzimbi ! what have you done with him ? Ha !" he went on, catching a fresh glimpse of Marchmont's face. "There is witchcraft here, and we have a short way with wizards in Matayani !"

Whereupon the fellow, quite sobered by his discovery, turned quickly to leave the hut and raise the alarm,

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But he had entirely overlooked the possibility of there being more than one person in the hut ; and that oversight cost him his life, for just as he reached the door and was stooping down to pass out, Tambusa leapt from his place of concealment and drove his broad-bladed assegai right through the fellow's body. Dubuza fell to the earth without uttering a sound, and Tambusa immediately rolled the body away into the shadows, where it would not be easily seen unless the hut were carefully searched ; then, turning to Hugh, who had sprung hastily from the bed, he said : " Come, *Inkos*, we must be going at once, danger or no danger ; we dare not wait here any longer ; for the Amazulu will soon begin to wonder at that dog's delay, and will come to look for him. We must set off at once, otherwise we shall be caught in a trap from which there will be no escape. See, there is a small cloud stealing across the face of the moon even now ; it is a good omen, *Baas*, for it is the only cloud in the sky. When its shadow falls upon the hut we must leave it and run for our lives, so as to be out of sight by the time that the moon shines again. Oh, there you are, *umfaan*," he went on, as Jack crawled quickly out of his hiding-place. " Be ready to run in a few minutes, and keep the little gun that shoots often in your hand, for you may have to use it."

" Tambusa is right," said Hugh, in answer to the questioning glance of the boy, " it is not of the slightest use for us to remain here any longer ; we must be ready to make a dash for life and liberty as soon as the moon goes behind that cloud. Are you ready ?" he added, a moment later, taking Jack's hand and looking out at the fast fading moonlight. " Then, *now !*" he whispered as darkness fell, like a pall over the enclosure, and the

three fugitives darted out of the hut and dashed at the top of their speed toward the southern gate in the thorn fence through which they fled just as the cloud vanished from before the face of the moon, and the whole place again became as light as day.

"So far, so good!" panted Hugh as he ran; "we are at least out of sight of the Zulus now; but they will certainly go to look for Dubuza before very long, and when they discover what has happened they will soon be hard upon our track. As for Soye, we cannot stop to look for him, now; but he is quite able to take care of himself, and he must follow after us as best he can."

The other two made no reply, but saved their breath for the long flight before them, knowing that before long they would need every ounce of strength they had in their bodies.

And a long flight it was, too; for there was all the distance between Matayani and the ravine to cover, and the village where Hugh and Soye had been pegged out to pass through before they could reach the last stage of the journey, the stage which commenced at the top of the cliff, the place where they would be comparatively safe if they could reach it before the pursuit overtook them.

It had taken Hugh and the two Kafirs some five hours to cover the distance between the foot of the cliff and the kraal of Matayani, but now under the pressing influence of fear the party did it in half that time, though they had a small lad with them; and Hugh's relief can be better imagined than described when in the light of the early morning he perceived that the village was empty of men, they having doubtless already gone away on a hunting expedition, like their brethren of Matayani.

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"Forward !" gasped Hugh, "forward ; once we can reach the foot of yonder cliff we shall be reasonably safe." And down the narrow, banana-bordered path leading to the village they ran, with panting breath and sore lungs, presently emerging into the level stretch of grass-land between the end of the path and the foot of the cliff, just as a loud shout from the path behind them announced that the Matayani men, having discovered Dubuza's body, had followed in pursuit of the fugitives.

"Quick, Jack," gasped Hugh, springing up the rocks and extending a helping hand to his brother, "we must make the passage of the cliff as quickly as we can, for it is quite likely that the Zulus may be possessed of rifles, in which case they will have very little difficulty in shooting us down as we climb. Good Heavens !" he continued, as a dark form seemed to spring from a ledge just above him, "who is that ?"

"*Lungili, Inkos !*" came a well-known voice in reply ; "it is I, Soye. I thought you must have gone on in front, as I have been rather a long time dealing with Inzimbi. But this is no time for explanations ; we must run for our lives. Let me take your other hand, *umfaan*, we shall travel quicker that way," he continued ; and without another word, the little party started afresh and ran at top speed toward the foot of the cliff.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SORCERER'S CAVE

"MERCIFUL powers !" exclaimed Hugh, as a long-drawn howl, like that of a pack of wolves in full cry, floated down the wind, "those fiends have sighted us at last ; and now indeed we shall have to race for our lives ! You are sure, Tambusa," he gasped, "that there is no chance of the Amazulu cutting us off before we get to the top of the cliff ; I mean there is no short cut of any kind to the summit, is there ?"

"No, *Inkos*," answered the *isanuisi*, "there is only this one way up ; and if we can get to the top before the Amazulu approach us near enough to use their assegais we may escape, after all ; because we shall then be not so very far away from my cave. And if we can but reach that we shall be comparatively safe ; for, once inside, the entrance can be held by one man against a host. I fear though," he continued, looking back and downward, "that we shall never do it ; and although this cliff face is full of hiding-places we are in plain view of the enemy, so there is no chance of our evading them in that way. Come up here, however, alongside me, *Inkos*, and take the *umfaan's* left hand, while I hold the other ; we shall get along faster that way, and there will not be so much fear of his stumbling."

"Right," assented Hugh, breathlessly, as by a mighty effort he swung himself up alongside the Kafir,

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who had already seized Jack's hand and was hauling him by main force up the cliff face, at the same time displaying all the agility of a monkey. They had by this time gained a distance of about fifty feet up the cliff, and would have attained a still greater height had they not been delayed by Jack, who was of course unused to such violent exercise ; but the howling Zulus were now perilously close to the foot of the precipice, and it seemed as though, unless they could be stopped in some way, they would overtake the fugitives within a very short time. Indeed several of them had now paused and were flinging their assegais in the hope of picking off the climbers who hung, like flies, upon the face of the cliff, while another large party started to climb up it, anxious to get to close quarters with the hated *Amalungu* and their companions the Bantu.

Marchmont was not so much afraid of any of the party being hit by an assegai, for it is a difficult matter, even for a Zulu, to be sure of his aim when flinging the weapon nearly vertically upward ; what he did fear was being overtaken by the savages before reaching level ground where he could put up some sort of a fight. He was overjoyed, however, to see that, even if they possessed rifles, the Zulus had not brought any firearms with them, for, if they had but started firing volleys, the fugitives could scarcely have avoided being hit by some of the searching rifle bullets.

For several minutes the young Englishman pushed and pulled his brother, shouldering him bodily up the cliff with the assistance of Tambusa, until the poor boy felt as though his arms were being pulled out of their sockets, but although the pain was intense the brave little chap made no complaint, and did all he could to assist those who were straining every nerve to get him to a

place of safety. So they progressed until Jack, wishing to see how far they had come, suddenly looked downward, and by doing so at that particular moment, undoubtedly saved his brother's life.

"Look out, Hugh, look out—just behind you!" he shrieked; and, turning his head rapidly, Marchmont saw that a couple of Zulus, hot, savage and breathless with their climb, had reached a ledge of rock which he had himself but that instant quitted, and were now standing, not six feet below him, in the very act of aiming their assegais at him. Soye was parallel to, and a little above Hugh some twelve feet away, but the Zulus took no notice of him; it was the white man, the man who had killed Dubuza, whose blood they wanted. It was a perilous moment for Hugh, but he kept his nerve; and shouting to Soye: "take the *unfaan's* other hand; I am going to keep these men back for a time!" he dropped on his knee behind a friendly piece of rock which, fortunately for him, jutted out at that particular place, and drew his revolver, just as a couple of *umkontos*, or throwing assegais, whizzed past his head and, striking the rocks with a metallic clatter, fell ringing into the valley below.

Seeing that their assegais had missed their mark, and now having only their *ixwas* remaining, the two leading Zulus, with howls of rage, utterly fearless of the death which they must have known awaited them, and desirous solely of slaying the white man, clambered quickly up the rocks until they were so close to Hugh that he could almost feel their hot, panting breath in his face; then, just as they grasped their stabbing-assegais and prepared to use them he leaned over the top of the rock which partially sheltered him and fired point blank into the naked, streaming bodies.

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The foremost savage, receiving the heavy bullet full in the centre of his brawny chest, threw up both his arms and plunged, without a single cry, into the valley below, while the second man, shot through the shoulder, dropped his assegai with a scream, and made desperate efforts with his one remaining unwounded arm to hold himself on to the face of the cliff; but gradually the anguish and the attendant loss of blood which was flowing in a stream from the wounded shoulder, together with the impossibility of supporting his whole weight with one hand alone, caused the fellow's fingers to slip, and little by little his grasp upon the projection of rock to which he was clinging relaxed.

For days afterward the look of utter, hopeless despair in the Zulu's eyes haunted Hugh, and for the moment he felt an almost irresistible impulse to stretch out his hand and haul the man into safety, but a second's reflection convinced him of the foolishness of any such action. For did he rescue the savage, the man's first thought would undoubtedly be to stab his rescuer to the heart. Even at that supreme moment, Marchmont noted, his eyes contained no appeal for mercy, no hope of rescue; they still shone with the glare of merciless and ferocious hate; and Hugh shuddered at the thought of any of his party now falling into the power of the black demons.

That last thought hardened Hugh's heart to the consistency of steel, and far from feeling any impulse to save the man from a horrible death, he had already leant out over the top of the rock to hurl the savage to his doom when the end suddenly came. Unable to continue his grasp any longer with fingers which were now almost numb with the strain which had been put upon them, the unhappy man, by a fearful effort, contrived to raise

his wounded arm and grip the rock, in the endeavour to momentarily relieve the strain upon his other hand ; but the fierce pain was too much, and with a moan of agony he was compelled to drop the stricken member once more to his side. As he did so, the fingers of the other hand began to slide off the rock, and the hapless savage made one last furious effort to save himself, scrabbling wildly at the face of the cliff, and at last calling to one of the Zulus who was just below him.

"Sitembu, Sitembu," he shrieked, "save me ! come and help me quickly, or I fall."

The appeal fell on deaf ears ; the fellow's friends were much more anxious to compass Hugh's death, capture, or destruction than they were to save one of their own tribe, and taking no heed of the doomed man, they continued their fierce scramble upward toward the place where Marchmont waited for them, hot anger in his heart and death in his hand. With one last shriek the Zulu's fingers slipped from their hold and he went whirling down the face of the precipice, bounding from rock to rock and screaming horribly at each fresh impact, until Marchmont's soul sickened within him at the horror of it all and he glanced apprehensively upward to see how Jack and his faithful bodyguard were getting on.

To his great relief he saw that, thanks to the help of the Kafirs, the lad had almost succeeded in reaching the top of the cliff, some seventy feet above, and he told himself that in five minutes' time his little party would be in comparative safety, and he would be able to continue his own ascent of the precipice. But meanwhile he had still a hard battle to fight in order to save his own life, and he had only just time to call to the others to continue their flight toward the cave as soon as

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they reached the summit when the Zulus were upon him again and for the second time that morning he only by a miracle escaped the shower of assegais which was hurled at him. Fortunately for himself he had now had a short breathing space, and had been able to reload his revolver, so that he had six men's lives in his hand, provided always that he shot straight, and he repaid the volley of spears which had just been thrown at him with three quick revolver bullets, each one of which hit its mark, sending as many of the savages to their death on the rocks below. Meanwhile, however, men had been swarming through and out of the village like ants out of an ant hill, and the cliff face was now literally black with climbing Zulus, while several of the later arrivals had taken up positions at the foot of the precipice, from which they started to blaze away at the young man with every kind of rifle, from the old, long-barrelled *roer* of the Boer, and the flintlock Tower musket, to the latest Martini-Henry weapon which Salvaterra had imported into the country for them; and Marchmont at once realised that, poor shots as the Zulus were with firearms, he could hardly hope to escape unscathed from that pelting shower of bullets and pot-leg.

However, he snuggled down still more closely behind his protecting rampart of rock, and taking careful and deliberate aim with his revolver, sent a man toppling down the cliff with every shot he fired, while a sudden outburst of shrieks and yells following immediately upon a furious volley from the riflemen below, announced the fact that some of the climbers had suffered severely from their friend's inaccuracy of aim.

"Now," thought Hugh to himself, "this ought to be my time; they have just loosed off a volley from every gun they possess, if one may judge by the row, and

it will take them a little time to reload ; moreover, they seem to have assisted me by shooting some of their own men, therefore I had better continue my ascent of the cliff before the beggars recover from their confusion, or come any nearer."

Quickly popping his head out from behind the shelter of the rock he took a rapid survey of the position, and seeing that the nearest climber was several yards below him, sprang out of his hiding-place and began to swarm up the precipice once more, looking upward as he did so in order to ascertain whether Jack had yet reached the summit. Apparently he had, for there was no sign of either him or the Kafirs ; and Hugh breathed more freely as he realised that, if his advice had been followed and the party were making for Tambusa's cave, every moment now gained would take them nearer and nearer safety.

As Marchmont started climbing, a perfect chorus of shouts and yells greeted his appearance, and he heard assegais clinking and ringing upon the rocks below him ; but fortunately he was beyond the range of the throwing spears, and they all fell short. He had not progressed a dozen yards, however, before a sharp, whip-like report rang out and a bullet *zipped* close past his ear, striking the rock just above his head and nearly blinding him with a cloud of dust and splinters of stone.

"That's rather too close to be pleasant," muttered the fugitive, between his teeth, as he increased his already almost superhuman efforts ; "that was a Martini bullet and was doubtless a fluke shot, but once those fellows get their muzzle-loading gas-pipe guns to work with charges of pot-leg, I suspect that I shall find myself in a tolerably warm corner."

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The young man's prophecy turned out to be only too correct, for a couple of minutes later he heard the loud, barking report of a muzzle-loader, and a perfect shower of pot-leg hurtled round him, while a sharp, stinging pain in the fleshy part of his left leg told him that one of the flying missiles had taken effect, although luckily it had missed hitting the bone. The warm stream however, which at once began to trickle down his leg, warned him that he was fast losing blood, and that it was by no means unlikely he might faint before he was able to reach the top of the cliff, in which case he would be dashed to pieces on the rocks below, and his brother would be left without a protector save Soye and the *isanuisi*, in a savage, hostile country, hundreds of miles from civilisation.

It was undoubtedly this thought that urged Hugh to even greater efforts than before, and in a few minutes' time he had the satisfaction of seeing safety only half a dozen yards above him. But his wound, although not a severe one, was badly jagged, as a result of the twisting of the piece of metal which had formed the missile from the *roer*, and consequently he was losing a great deal more blood than he had any idea of, so that, by the time that he was almost at the summit, he found that his head was beginning to swim, and that a feeling of deadly sickness and faintness was creeping over him.

"Oh God!" he cried bitterly, "do not let me fail now, when I have come so far; give me strength to continue; let me at least set eyes upon my brother once more." And so, gasping and sobbing with weakness, climbing frantically upward, and swaying perilously hither and thither, the young man at last was able to grasp the top of the precipice and haul himself slowly and painfully upward until he lay safely on the grass

at the summit. For a moment he felt that his senses were deserting him ; but the knowledge of what must inevitably happen, should he allow himself to faint at that moment, kept him up, and with trembling fingers he rolled up his trousers, disclosing a ghastly-looking wound in the fleshy part of his leg, just above the knee.

It was the work of but a few seconds to rip his handkerchief into strips, then tying them together and twisting them into a bandage, he bound it tightly into position above the wound so as to reduce the flow of blood which was taking all the strength from him ; the wound itself, he decided, would have to remain open for a time, until he reached safer surroundings, as there was no time to attend to it at the moment. By means of a piece of stout stick which he luckily found close at hand, he was able to form a tourniquet of linen, twisting it up so tightly that the circulation was almost completely stopped, and the blood ceased to flow. He was still oppressed however, with a feeling of deadly faintness, and it was with profound thankfulness that he at this moment accidentally discovered a flask of brandy in the pocket of Salvaterra's coat which he had doubtless formed the habit of carrying with him in case of need on his long journeys.

In a moment he had dragged the bottle out, and after taking a deep draught of the stimulant, found his strength returning to him in great waves, so that in a minute or two afterward he was able to stagger to his feet, feeling almost his former self again. His first action was to peep over the top of the precipice in order to see how near to the summit the Zulus were, and to his horror he found that four of them were within half a dozen yards of it. To press fresh cartridges into his revolver was the work of but a few seconds, and the next moment

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he craned over the top of the cliff and, taking careful aim at the foremost Zulu, fired. To his great disappointment Hugh missed the man entirely, the bullet striking a projection of rock a few inches above the fellow's head, and glancing off into space ; but the second time he fired more carefully still, and the heavy .450 bullet drove straight downward into the man's skull, scattering his brains over the men who were climbing alongside him, while the body, after hanging for a brief second against the cliff face, suddenly collapsed and went hurtling down the precipice, dashing another man headlong from his precarious position.

There were only two more men now left of whom Hugh needed to take any immediate account, and he was fortunate enough to pick them both off with his next two shots ; after which the other Zulus paused irresolutely, being far from anxious to draw upon themselves the attention of a man who could kill them with such almost absolute certainty. This was exactly what Hugh wanted ; so after emptying his pistol at such of the savages as he could see, in order to increase their panic, he rose to his feet once more and looked about eagerly for traces of his brother and the two Kafirs.

For a few seconds he was unable to see anything of them, and his heart throbbed with apprehension lest perchance they might have fallen in with another party of the enemy ; but the next moment he saw three figures appear on the skyline from behind a clump of trees about a couple of miles distant, and with a shout of joy he dashed in their direction, loading his revolver again as he ran ; and, although the motion of running caused his wound to give him excruciating pain, he got along so well that in about an hour he overtook Jack and the natives, whom he found to be likewise running as fast

as exhaustion and lack of breath would permit, Tambusa and Soye assisting the boy over the rough path so well that he was able to keep up a good, round pace without very much difficulty to himself.

"Shall we do it, Tambusa?" was Hugh's first breathless question as he raced up alongside the panting Kafirs, and smiled encouragingly at the youngster. The *isanuisi* turned quickly round as he ran; then for answer pointed in the direction from which Hugh had just come, and shrugged his shoulders, turning at the same time an expressive look in Soye's direction which the latter evidently understood, for he at once increased his already rapid pace still further.

From the behaviour of his followers Hugh at once guessed what was happening in the rear, and knew why Tambusa was saving his breath, a rapid glance behind him on his own account revealing to him the fact that the Zulus had reached the summit of the cliff, and were racing along after them, about a couple of miles in the rear. Moreover it seemed as though the numbers of the Zulus were momentarily increasing to an alarming extent, and Marchmont at once guessed that the first man to reach the summit having found that he was no longer menaced by the white man's deadly *isibamu 'nyani* (revolver), had signalled to his companions that the coast was now clear, with the result that every able-bodied Zulu from Matayani had swarmed up the cliff with the intention of taking part in the excitement of a man-hunt.

From the spot which the fugitives had now reached the distance to the *isanuisi*'s cave was very nearly five miles; and it was just an open question whether the Zulus would or would not overtake them before they could reach that haven of comparative safety. For

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although the little band had quite a couple of miles start, there was more than twice that distance to travel, while over rough ground a Zulu will run almost as fast as a cantering horse ; moreover one of the pursued was a little boy, and the other three were very nearly exhausted by their previous efforts. Away in the hazy blue distance Marchmont could make out the hill below whose summit the cavern was situated ; and at the foot of the hill, at the side nearest to them, he could also make out the thin, silvery streak which denoted the position of the little river which he and the two Kafirs had forded not twenty-four hours previously ; but both river and hill looked a cruelly long distance away now.

If they could but reach the banks of the river without being overtaken, Marchmont told himself, he might perhaps be able to again keep the enemy at bay by picking them off as they forded the stream ; and under the impulse of this new hope, which he communicated to his companions, the four almost exhausted fugitives nerved themselves to still greater efforts. Tambusa, loyal soul, had up to this point been putting forth almost superhuman efforts to assist Jack along, and it was now all too evident that his exertions were beginning to tell heavily upon him, for his face turned that ghastly, greenish tint which, in a Kafir, takes the place of paleness in a European, while his breath was coming in great thick gasps, and Hugh saw that the *isannusi* could not hold out very much longer. He therefore gently pushed the man away from Jack's side and himself took the boy's hand, although the wound in his leg, together with the impaired circulation caused by the tourniquet which he had applied there, were causing him so much pain that every step was a distinct agony, and the sweat of

suffering pouring from his brow like rain nearly blinded him.

Still he set his teeth hard and kept his eyes fixed upon the goal in front of him, for the hill and stream gradually began to assume an increasing distinctness through the heat haze. Tambusa was slowly recovering his breath, now that he was relieved of the effort of helping the boy along, but poor Soye was beginning to exhibit manifest symptoms of distress; his mouth was wide open, and his eyes looked as though they would start from his head, while round his lips great bubbles of froth came and went, like foam on the muzzle of a racing horse.

Presently the exhausted man could do his double work no longer, so Tambusa, himself now partially recovered, took his place, and the fugitives continued to race forward with scarcely diminished speed; but the hoarse shouts and yells from the pursuing savages sounded ever closer and closer in their ears.

"Ah! at last; thank God!" gasped Hugh as the party staggered to the top of a small rise in the ground. "The river at last! Forward! forward! we may yet win through!"

Down the slope toward the stream they rushed, thus gaining a few yards on their pursuers, and a minute or two later the four of them were ploughing and fighting their way over the shallows toward the opposite bank. Half way across, however, Hugh, who was bringing up the rear, was startled by a cry from Tambusa of: "Look out; look out, *Baas!* there must have been rain up in the hills, for the river is swollen, and we shall have to swim." And looking ahead, Marchmont saw that the Kafirs were already off their feet and were swimming across, each with an arm round Jack's shoulder.

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Luckily, Jack also knew something about swimming, and was able to assist the natives, or the passage of the river might well have ended in disaster, for the stream was running fast ; but as it was they reached the opposite bank and climbed up into safety just as Hugh himself, having wrapped his revolver and the few remaining cartridges in the water-proof case, was swept off his feet and began to swim across the deep part.

At this moment the Zulus dashed up to the bank which the fugitives had just left, and while some of them at once plunged in and began to swim after the white man, the others remained on the bank hurling their assegais at the swimmer, in the hope of killing or disabling him. Hugh's fortunate star was, however, still in the ascendant, for he reached the shore without mishap, finding to his relief that the rest of the party were already a quarter of a mile ahead on their way to safety.

"Now," he muttered to himself, "I'll see if I cannot read these fellows a lesson which they badly need. If I can pick off a few before they get across it may possibly serve to damp the ardour of the others so much that they will not dare to risk the passage."

So saying, he whipped his revolver out of its case and, levelling it at the nearest black head, fired, the owner of the head instantly throwing up his hands with a piercing scream, and going under, to be rolled over and over along the sandy bottom of the river until his body eventually floated out to sea. The young Englishman was rather afraid lest, despite all his care, his cartridges should have suffered during his passage of the river, but the cases were of brass and the swaged bullets fitted tightly, so he trusted that there would be no miss-fire at the critical moment ; and fortunately for him, his hope was justified, for every time he pulled the trigger a heavy

bullet found its billet in the body of one of the swimming natives.

In the face of so steady and deadly a fire the Zulus found it simply impossible to get across, and after no less than nine of their number had been killed they postponed further attempt until such time as the Englishman should be compelled to abandon his post. This, however, he had no intention of doing until he saw that Jack and the Kafirs had reached the cavern, for he knew that directly he himself turned to run, the Zulus would swim across and be after him. He therefore waited patiently until he saw that his party had actually reached the cave, when firing six shots into the cluster of savages on the opposite side, he turned and dashed at top speed for the cavern, reaching it and falling down exhausted on the floor at the very moment that the foremost Zulu clambered out of the water on the hither side of the stream and started in hot pursuit of the white man who had so long kept him and his companions at bay.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT HANDGRIPS WITH DEATH

ALTHOUGH terribly exhausted, Hugh did not remain very long in his swoon ; the ever-present knowledge of a terrible danger hanging over his little party served in some sort as a stimulant, and he awoke, some five minutes later, to find Soye bending anxiously over him, chafing his fevered temples and sprinkling his forehead with cold water, while Tambusa, a few yards away, was working like a demon at the mouth of the cave, piling stones and boulders across the entrance to act as a sort of breastwork against the attack of the Zulus, which they all knew must take place within a very short time.

For a few moments he lay with his head on Soye's knee, idly watching the other native as he darted to and fro, scarcely able to realise, in his dazed condition, what was taking place ; but a second or two afterward a fearful, heart-shaking yell burst upon his ears, and in a flash he returned to earth and to a realisation of the fearful peril that they were still in.

Although his head throbbed as though it would burst, while his wounded leg ached and smarted so cruelly that he could scarcely stand upright, Marchmont struggled to his feet and gamely joined in the work of building a barricade, the completion of which, before the Zulus should arrive on the scene and recommence the attack, was the fugitives' only hope of being able to keep the

enemy at bay, and ultimately to effect their escape. Nearer and nearer drew the ferocious cries, showing that the Zulus were now assured of their prey ; and, as the deep-toned, murderous sound grew ever louder and louder, so did the three men increase their herculean efforts, until at last a breastwork of stone, about three feet in height and the same in thickness, stretched right across the mouth of the cave from wall to wall, completely blocking the entrance, and the fugitives had now at least a fighting chance for their lives, instead of being absolutely at the mercy of the enemy.

But Hugh knew very well that a defence only three feet in height would not keep a crowd of Zulus, thirsty for blood, at bay very long, and he urged the two sweating Kafirs to still greater efforts, himself doing the work of two men, wounded though he was ; and gradually, little by little, as it seemed, though actually with incredible rapidity, the rampart grew higher and higher, although to the anxious eyes of the defenders it seemed as though progress was dreadfully slow.

The two friendly natives had already collected all the weapons which were available, and they now stood piled in a heap at the foot of the barricade, ready to be used directly the time came for action. There was a sheaf of a dozen or so throwing assegais, together with four or five *ixwas*, the deadly broad-bladed stabbing weapon, while against the wall of the cavern stood three stout, ox-hide shields, capable of turning at least an assegai-thrust at close quarters. But what delighted Marchmont more than anything else was the sight of a beautiful Martini-Henry carbine which lay propped against a boulder, while beside it stood a large box of ball-cartridge ammunition ! Where the crafty *isanuisi* had obtained the weapon Hugh did not know, nor, at

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the present juncture, did he care to inquire too curiously ; sufficient for him was it that the weapon would make all the difference between the ability to beat off the Zulus, and being overwhelmed by them. But he very shrewdly guessed that Tambusa had not been above having certain dealings with one Salvaterra, a gun-smuggler ; and the Englishman devoutly thanked heaven that, in this case, the Kafir had been unable to resist the temptation to possess a rifle, although such was strictly forbidden by Colonial law.

"Is the *isibamu* (rifle) in good order, Tambusa ?" inquired Hugh, suddenly picking up the weapon, opening the breech, and squinting down the barrel, while he filled both pockets with cartridges from the ammunition box beside him.

"*E'we*, '*Nkos*," answered the perspiring native, smiling ; "it is in perfect order, and I brought it out on purpose for you to use, *Baas* ; for you are a good shot with the rifle, much better than I or my brother. But, '*Nkos*, if we get safely out of this trouble you will not tell the Amapolis (police) that I possess it, will you ? I should not like them to take that gun away from me."

"All right, Tambusa," replied Marchmont, "I will keep your secret, never fear ; but work away, men, work away ; I can hear the Zulus searching for us among the rocks even now."

The breastwork was by this time about four feet high, and was strong enough to afford a considerable amount of protection ; but the gallant defenders of the cavern had only just completed their work in time, for, as Hugh said, the enemy could be plainly heard scrambling over the rocks and thrusting their assegais between the boulders in the hope of finding their prey concealed there, while the ferocious shouts and yells of rage which rent the

still morning air when they failed to find the fugitives, were positively appalling. It was a most fortunate circumstance that the savages were unaware of Tambusa's hiding-place; for, had they been, they could have rushed the rampart before it was high enough to be of any real use, and massacred the defenders forthwith; but, as it was, every moment that the enemy wasted in searching gave the little garrison a better chance for their lives.

It could not be expected, however, that much more time would elapse before the searchers discovered the cave, and Hugh had only just taken up the rifle, after handing his own revolver to Soye, and sending Jack into a position of safety at the back of the cavern, when one of the Zulus, happening to glance upward at the critical moment, saw Tambusa's head showing above the barricade as he laboured at the task of placing stones in position on it, and with a yell of horrid joy, the man at once drew the attention of his fellows to the spot. Immediately a long-drawn plaintive cry, like that of a wounded wolf, was sent up as a signal of recall to the rest of the man-hunters; and in a few minutes the whole Zulu force, some three hundred strong, was drawn up on the rough, boulder-strewn ground in front of the cavern, where the *indunas*, or head men, immediately engaged in a council of war which gave Hugh's little party yet another short respite in which to strengthen their defences.

Marchmont had been careful, while building up the breastwork, to leave about half a dozen small crevices between the stones which composed it, to form loopholes, and as he saw the council of war about to break up, he pointed his rifle through one of the apertures, ready to open fire directly the enemy made a move.

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Soye he stationed on his right, placing the few remaining revolver cartridges in a heap at the Kafir's side, at the same time giving him instructions to be very careful with his fire and not to shoot until he was sure of hitting the man he aimed at, for .450 ammunition was scarce and it would not do to waste a single shot. Tambusa, half dead with fatigue from the exertion which he had already undergone that morning, was stationed on Hugh's left, being given all the throwing assegais which the party possessed, while a stabbing spear was placed on the ground beside each man, ready for action should the fight develop into a hand-to-hand encounter in which firearms would be useless.

Then, at last, just when the Englishman thought that the Zulus were about to commence a determined attack, he saw a man, clad in a leopard-skin *muchu*, and weaponless, save for a great ox-hide shield slung across his shoulder, leave the closely-packed ranks and walk slowly and fearlessly toward the breastwork, at the same time raising both his hands above his head to show that he was unarmed. The Zulus were, for some reason or other, sending a herald; the young man therefore sprang bodily on to the top of the rampart and waited, with folded arms, for the envoy's approach.

When the Zulu had advanced to within a dozen feet of the entrance of the cave, he stopped, and dropping his hands to his side, cried in a loud, ringing voice, so that none of his address might be lost upon Soye and the *isanuisi*: "Ho! 'mlungu, dog of a white man who has dared to come into this country without the permission of the Great Great One who sits at Ulundi, and who has had the audacity to enter the kraal of Matayani and take thence the *umfaan* whom Inzimbi gave us for a sacrifice, hear now my word. Give up the white boy

to us, as well as the two Bantu mongrels who are in the cave with you, and tell us what you have done with our friend Inzimbi, and I will swear to let you go free out of the country. But if you refuse these conditions then will we, the Amazulu, attack your stronghold, and we will not abandon that attack until we have captured every one of you. Then shall you three men die by the torture of the black ants upon the hill of slaughter at Matayani, while the boy shall be sent to our master at Ulundi to become his own slave. Think well before you reply, O *'mlungu*, for I shall not a second time give you the chance to accept these conditions."

"I shall not need it," answered Hugh, his voice ringing scornfully, "for I have but one answer to return to you. I reject your conditions; and I tell you that you may deal with me as you please—if you can take me alive. But that you shall never do; for we shall defend this place to the last gasp and in such a manner that the warriors of the King will be sorry that they did not return to Matayani and leave us unmolested. Moreover, one thing I swear, and that is, that the white boy, my brother, shall never fall alive into your clutches for rather will I kill him with my own hands. I have spoken!"

"Very well, then, white man," shouted the savage through his teeth, "you shall abide by your words, but out of your own mouth have you spoken your doom; and we shall see whether you will crow as bravely when you lie stretched out upon the hill of torment and the ants are picking the living flesh from your bones. Ha, ha! you will be sorry then that you set an *impi* of the Amazulu at defiance; and with my own ears will I listen to your cries for mercy, your prayers to be put out of your misery. But there will be no mercy for you;

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and I myself, I, Banda, a herald of the king, will see to it that you do not die too soon. *Whau!* I too have spoken !”

Then, changing his tone, he addressed the two Kafirs who were leaning over the edge of the rampart. “To you two Bantu dogs I speak,” he said. “Hear my words. Give up the white man and the white boy ; and instead of killing you, or making you slaves, I will permit you to depart in safety to your own country, giving you, besides, a present of ten oxen apiece. What say ye ? Will ye accept safety by giving up the two white people ; or will ye persist in your stubbornness, and die the death of dogs upon the slaying ground ?”

The fellow ceased, waiting with a smile upon his face for the Kafirs to reply, for he thought that there could be no doubt as to the men’s decision, and he felt that he had checkmated the insolent white man and got the whole party into his power. But he had vastly underrated the fidelity of the loyal natives. With a fierce oath Soye sprang up on the barricade and standing by the side of his master, cried in a ringing voice : “Return, O Banda, to the cattle-pen from whence you came ; for neither I nor my brother will betray the white man, our master ; on the contrary, we will defend him and the *umfaan* while breath remains in our bodies ; and it shall cost you many lives ere you cross the rampart on which I stand. One of your conditions I will comply with, however and that is to tell you what has become of your friend, Inzimbi. After the *umfaan* had been delivered out of the hands of your priests we came back to the hut where we had left Inzimbi bound and helpless on the floor, and since we dare not leave him where he was, my master told me to take him away to where he could not interfere with our plans. And this I did, O

Banda ; for I led him to the water-drip under which he had ordered the white boy to be placed ; and that he might perfectly understand what the torture was like to which he had doomed another, I placed him under the stream, binding him into position there so that he could not move ; and, since he was so securely gagged that he could not utter a sound the probability is that Inzimbi is still there where I left him ; and you are welcome to what will remain of your friend by the time that you get back to Matayani to rescue him. I too, have spoken."

So saying the Kafir leapt down from the breastwork, while a perfect hurricane of yells and shouts of rage arose from the *impi*, the men of which had heard every word that Soye had said. For a few seconds the herald stood absolutely still, stricken dumb by this amazing news ; then he turned abruptly on his heel and stalked forward to rejoin his comrades, who were already unslinging their shields preparatory to making an attack, while Hugh himself remained where he was for a second or two, aghast at the fate to which he had unwittingly consigned the man Salvaterra by not being more careful in his choice of words.

But this was no time for useless regrets ; for directly the herald rejoined the ranks of the Zulus the latter set up their hideous, unearthly war-shout and, with assegai hafts rattling savagely against their hide shields, advanced impetuously to the attack. "Now you two men," exclaimed Hugh, springing down from his exposed situation, "the Amazulu are on the point of making their charge, and will be swarming about our ears in a minute or two ; therefore do not lose your heads. Keep up your courage and obey my orders implicitly, then we shall probably beat the enemy off ; but if you

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do not do as you are told we shall all be lost. Now, to your posts ; *here they come !*"

As he spoke Hugh rapidly thrust the barrel of his carbine through a loophole, and, taking careful aim, pulled the trigger, one of the foremost Zulus immediately testifying to the accuracy of the shot by leaping high off the ground and falling dead among his comrades. To reload and fire again was the work of but a few seconds, and the young man had already sent seven of the charging savages to their deaths when the attack came within the range of Soye's revolver, and that worthy, firing nearly as coolly as his master, also chimed in with his weapon. The snap of rifle and revolver now became incessant, each man loading and firing as fast as he could into the close-packed Zulus, who offered a target that it was nearly impossible to miss ; while since they were charging up-hill and over rough ground in a confined space, they took a quite appreciable time to cover the distance between their starting-point and the entrance to the cave, consequently they suffered fearfully before they came close enough even to hurl their assegais.

But presently they had advanced to within about thirty yards of the breastwork, and the spears began to hurtle through the air to fall clattering upon the rampart or to slither harmlessly along the floor of the cavern to where Jack, boyishly eager to do something on his own account in this game of war, carefully gathered them up into bundles which he laid down as close as he dared to go to the ramparts, in a place where the men could easily reach them as they wanted them. *Crack : crack : crack* : rang out the two firearms, until the barrels became almost too hot to touch, while Tambusa, standing a little way back from the barricade, hurled his *umkontos* with a deadly aim which seldom missed, and

the attackers were beginning to lose heavily, the ground outside the cavern entrance being strewn with quite a score of bodies, some lying perfectly still, while others, desperately hurt, writhed like maimed snakes in the agony of their wounds.

But the Zulus did not intend to submit to punishment such as this without giving something in return, and they made the most desperate efforts to scale the rampart so as to get to close quarters with its defenders ; but the latter had made good use of their time, and the barricade was not easy to climb in the face of such a withering fire as Hugh and Soye were keeping up. Man after man succeeding in reaching the top, only to be shot at once and to go toppling back upon his comrades beneath, while Tambusa bravely kept his end up with his *ixwa*, the blade of which was already dripping with blood. Exasperated by such a stubborn defence, and knowing that the fugitive's chief strength lay in their firearms, the savages made herculean efforts to wrench them out of their owners' hands, seizing the almost red-hot barrels and trying to drag them away even when writhing in the death agony, with a bullet from those same barrels in their bodies.

Hurled back from the rampart, time after time, wounded and dying from the fierce volleys from Soye's revolver, pierced through and through by the heavy bullets fired at short range from Marchmont's carbine, cut and stabbed by the furiously-wielded assegai of Tambusa, the blade of which gleamed dull-red in the rays of the morning sun, the enemy still came on with unabated ferocity and apparently undiminished numbers, until, at last, Hugh was reluctantly compelled to admit to himself that it would not be possible for the little band of defenders, strive as they might, to keep the

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savages at bay very much longer. Hugh's leg, too, was paining him so much that, every time he moved, he had much ado to avoid crying out with the torture of the wound, while Tambusa and Soye were both bleeding from numerous assegai-thrusts and cuts. Jack, in the back of the cavern, was the only unwounded member of the party, though he fully exposed himself to danger by running hither and thither to pick up the spears which lay on the rocky floor.

Moreover, ammunition for the revolver was now running perilously low, and Marchmont knew that, once it was exhausted, it would be an impossibility to keep the Zulus out any longer, and his heart sank within him at the thought of what would happen should the savages succeed in rushing the frail barricade which was the only barrier between them and their prey. It seemed, indeed, as though the cave were nothing but a death-trap which would also prove to be the grave of all of them, for no retreat was possible.

It was not death, however, that Hugh was looking forward to with so much horror ; it was the thought that, before he himself was killed, when all hope was at an end, he would be compelled to slay his small brother, the being whom he loved best in all the world, so that he might not again fall into the merciless hands of the enemy ; and there was also the horrible fear that, perhaps at the last, the defenders, instead of being slain outright, might be so effectually disabled as to fall alive into the hands of the Zulus, to be nursed and tended carefully until their wounds should heal, so that they might come fresh and strong to some hideous form of torture which the enemy would undoubtedly prepare for them.

But none of the three men had much time for thought of this sort, although it was apparent, from the dogged,

hopeless expression on the Kafir's faces, that they too feared the worst ; for at that moment, with even more savage determination than before, the Zulus charged again at the now tottering breastwork, and so savage was their rush that the deadly rifle and revolver-fire failed this time to stop them, and in a second the black demons were in among the defenders, cutting, stabbing, and slashing with the fury and vindictiveness of disappointed fiends. For a few desperate moments Marchmont thought that the end was come, and during a momentary pause in the fight his eye roved round for Jack, so that he might know where he was in order to send his last shot through his heart ; and he saw him, holding a sheaf of assegais in his hand, sitting white and wide-eyed in the most remote corner of the cavern, well out of reach of the combatants.

To and fro surged the savagely struggling men, the Zulus animated solely by the desire for revenge and slaughter, while the Englishman and the two Kafirs fought with the fury of despair, wielding their weapons like the berserks of old, until the attackers began to think that the immunity of the little party was due to magic, and Marchmont several times caught the long-drawn, hissing whispers of "*tagati*" (bewitched), and "*bulala isannisi*" (slay the wizards). Indeed it seemed, after a time, as though the stalwart savages were really beginning to believe that some superhuman power was defending their enemies, for the fury of their attack gradually diminished, and several of them began to cast anxious glances at the cave entrance, as though to make sure that the sun still shone there.

Encouraged by these signs, Marchmont shouted to the two Kafirs to redouble their efforts and drive the Zulus out of the cavern, himself leading the charge and

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wielding his clubbed carbine with terrible effect upon the enemy ; and it soon began to appear as though the attackers would be repulsed after all. Then, in a flash, the Zulus adopted a tactic which they had many a time used before and which came very near to undoing the little party of defenders. Tambusa and Soye were using their broad-bladed assegais, and Marchmont himself carried one in his left hand, all three of them doing dreadful execution until, suddenly, a tall savage stooped down and, picking up the dead body of one of his comrades, hurled it with all his force upon the point of Tambusa's weapon.

The Kafir reeled under the weight thus unexpectedly put upon him and before he could recover his *ixwa* from the corpse, the thrower of this ghastly missile leapt upon him and began thrusting furiously at the helpless man with his assegai. But the dead man's work was not quite done, for, fortunately, the body as it was released from the spear rolled against Tambusa and received the thrusts that were intended for the Kafir's body ; while the next moment, Soye settled that particular encounter by thrusting his revolver into the fellow's ribs, at the same time pulling the trigger and blowing a great hole in the enterprising savage's side. The fall of the tall man completed the discomfiture of the Zulus and, slowly and sullenly, but none the less surely, they retreated toward the mouth of the cave, defending themselves fiercely from the frenzied attack of Hugh's little party, who, now that the tables were turned, were bent on destroying as many of their enemies as possible ; and at last the Zulus, having reached the barricade, turned and leaped it, followed by a shower of assegais from the exultant defenders.

Exultant they certainly were in the fact of having

driven off an attacking force which had, at one moment, threatened to overwhelm them ; but the exultation was short-lived, for both Hugh and the Kafirs were well enough acquainted with Zulu tactics to be aware that the latter would never give up while one of the fugitives remained alive. They would attack again and again, until the defence was worn down ; or, if that were impossible, they would simply sit down before the cavern entrance and starve its occupants out. No ; the only hope left to the little party lay in their being rescued by a superior force of English soldiers, and that was the most unlikely event in the world, for nobody knew, in the first place, whereabouts in Zululand the party was, and, in the second, there were no soldiers, as far as they knew, within a radius of a couple of hundred miles.

It was evident to Hugh, after looking cautiously over the tottering breastwork and seeing the Zulus engaged in an *indaba*, or council of war, that the enemy did not intend to again try to carry the place by assault, but that they meant to sit down outside and wait until starvation had done its fell work ; for he saw many of the Zulus gathering up their assegais and binding them into sheaves, afterwards stacking them together and leaning their war shields against the rocks and boulders ; and his heart almost failed him as he realised that now there was indeed no escape. Almost better would it have been, he thought, had the Zulus persisted in their attempt to carry the cavern by assault ; for in that case the end would have come quickly, and he would have taken care that when the very last vestige of hope had vanished, when the Zulus could no longer be kept at bay, and immediate capture or death had become absolutely inevitable, his small brother Jack's passing at

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least should have been swift and easy. But now who could tell how long they might all be compelled to linger on, cooped up in that cavern, desperately eking out a wretched, hopeless existence upon starvation rations? For in response to an order Tambusa had already produced for Hugh's inspection the entire stock of provisions which the cavern contained—a quarter of bush-buck, already strongly tainted, about half a dozen mealie cobs, a quarter of a sack of mealie meal, and about two gallons of exceedingly brackish water, contained in a gourd; about sufficient to keep life in the party for three or four days, or maybe a week at the utmost. And during the whole of that time they would be lingering on, enduring ever-growing torments—Hugh already knew from past experience how acute is the suffering produced by long-protracted hunger and thirst; yet he felt that, though he should see Jack slowly perishing before his eyes he would not have the heart or the courage to cut the child's sufferings short by a merciful revolver-shot, because it is an instinct of humanity, under such circumstances, to persistently hope for the happening of the impossible, which in their case would mean the anticipation of deliverance by a miracle.

Marchmont had almost come to the dreadful determination to shoot Jack and then sally forth, attack the Zulus, and die fighting, when he heard the boy's voice calling softly from the far end of the cavern in low but excited tones: "Hugh, Hugh, come here at once—quickly; I have something to show you!" There was a ring of excitement in his voice; and Hugh somehow felt hope once more rising in his breast as he dropped his carbine and assegai and hastened to the boy's side. Jack was on his knees, in a dark corner of the cavern

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where stalagmites and stalactites protruded both from floor and roof, some of them meeting in mid-air and forming all kinds of weird and fantastic shapes. As Marchmont dropped on his knees by Jack's side the boy pointed eagerly in front of him and exclaimed : "Look there, Hugh ; look there ! do you think there is any chance of our getting away from these natives through *that* place ?"

CHAPTER XIX

ON THE FACE OF THE WATERS

As Hugh's eyes followed the direction of Jack's finger he saw that the lad was pointing to a black hole in the rock, situated just above the base of a large stalagmite, where a casual observer would never have noticed it ; and in a moment the young man had stretched himself at full length upon the ground and dragged himself slowly and painfully up to the aperture indicated, which was anything but easy of access. It was a circular hole about eighteen to twenty inches in diameter, situated about a foot above the rocky floor of the cavern, and it seemed just wide enough to permit the passage of the shoulders of a full-grown man, although it had no appearance of ever having been used before by a human being ; indeed, as has already been said, its position was such as to render it practically impossible of detection except by the merest accident.

"Good heavens !" ejaculated Marchmont, excitedly, striking a match and holding the tiny flame as far as he could inside the hole, "what if this should indeed by some miraculous chance prove to be the avenue of escape ?" It seemed almost too good to be true ; for, but five short minutes ago every person comprising the little party of fugitives had been looking forward to nothing short of certain death within a few days, at the longest. Besides, it was hardly likely that an opening of

this sort, in the solid rock itself, would prove to be anything else than an aperture leading, perhaps, into a larger cavern without an exit of any kind. They might, however, if it proved possible to squeeze through the hole, take refuge in the chamber to which it gave access ; for a single man, guarding the entrance from the inside, would be able to keep a host at bay ; but it was just a question whether it was worth while taking the trouble, for it was practically certain that the enemy would not again attempt to carry the place by assault, and the besieged would starve just as readily in the inner cave as in the outer.

But "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," and as the young man peered, with straining eyes, into the gloom before him, the thought came to him that perhaps, after all, there might be escape that way ; at all events nothing would be lost by exploring the place.

"Hi, Tambusa !" he called to the *isanuisi*, who was busily engaged in picking up the assegais and knobkerries with which the cavern floor was liberally strewn, so that the weapons might be at hand should the Zulus decide to attack again—"Tambusa, come here ; I want to show you something. You, Soye, stay by the barricade, keep an eye upon the enemy's movements, and report at once if they show any signs of advancing."

"*E'we, Inkos,*" answered the natives in their deep, rumbling tones, and Tambusa hurried forward to his master's side, while Soye applied his eye to one of the loopholes in the barricade from whence he could see the Zulus without being observed by them.

"Now, Tambusa," exclaimed Marchmont, when the sorcerer came up, "I suppose it is useless to ask you whether you know any way out of this trap other than the one by which we entered it ?"

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"*Whau, Inkos,*" replied the Kafir, "I know of none, but there *may* be another way out—I never thought of that. Now you come to speak of it I remember hearing some men of my tribe once remarking that there was thought to be an underground passage leading from the Umvolosi river up through the bowels of this hill to the cave ; but nobody seemed to have ever actually seen or found it ; and I should think that it was merely a legend told to amuse the *isinsiswa* (boys). But why does the *Baas* ask ? Even if there were one, I do not think we should find the opening in *this* cavern, for I have lived here for a long time and seen no signs of it. We might make some torches though, and have another look round so as——"

"Well look here, Tambusa," ruthlessly interrupted Hugh, standing aside from in front of the hole which Jack had discovered, "what do you think of *this* ? Do you think there is any likelihood of *this* proving to be the entrance to the passage ?"

"*Whau ! whau !* let me look, *Baas !*" exclaimed the *isanuisi*, in wild excitement. "I have never seen this hole before, and from the appearance of it, I should say that it may very easily prove to be the tunnel of which the *isanuisi* spoke."

So saying he seized the box of matches which Hugh held out to him and, stretching himself flat on his stomach, began to worm his way along the ground until his head and shoulders vanished from sight inside the hole. Then there was a sudden flicker of light as the man struck a match, silence for quite a minute, and then Tambusa started crawling backward out of the aperture in a furious hurry, bumping his woolly head upon a piece of rock as he rose to his feet and stood in front of his master, trembling with excitement.

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"*Whau, Inkos!*" he exclaimed breathlessly, "I did not dream of the existence of such a place as there is in there; it is a cavern quite three times the size of this one; ay, so large that one cannot see the further side of it, or the roof; I could see nothing like another opening in the wall nearest to me, but the gloom inside there is so deep that there might be ten openings and yet we should not see them unless we were close to them. There *may* be a way out for us, after all, *Inkos*, and we may yet outwit the Amazulu. I will go forward and explore, *Baas*, while you and Soye stay here with the *umfaan*; for there is no need for us all to go until we see that there is an exit from the other cavern."

"Go by all means, Tambusa," said Hugh, excitedly, grasping Jack's hand in his own and squeezing it encouragingly; "go my boy; but be as quick as you can; for if the Zulus should attack again we could not hope to repulse them if we were one man short."

"All right, *Inkos*," said the *isanuisi*, "I will not be very many minutes away." Then, without another word, the plucky fellow lay down on the ground once more, worked himself head first through the hole, and in another moment vanished from the eager eyes of the two white people who were so anxiously awaiting the result of his investigations. Five minutes passed, and then ten, and there was no sign of Tambusa returning, nor could the watchers hear anything of his movements in the next cavern; and they began at last to feel rather anxious about him. Then, when another five minutes had passed without any sign of the man returning, Hugh shouted softly into the huge chamber, telling the *isanuisi* not to waste any more time than was absolutely necessary; but his voice echoed and re-echoed round the vaulted cavern without eliciting any

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response from the Kafir ; indeed the silence in that vast apartment of rock was something that could be felt, except when Marchmont shouted for Tambusa, when his voice reverberated round the place, filling it with weird and startling echoes.

At last, when Hugh was only prevented from going in search of the man by Jack's appeals, he heard the soft "*shuffle-shuffle*" of naked feet on damp rock, and the next moment Tambusa pushed his head through the opening and, turning his grinning face to Hugh's, whispered joyously : "I have found a way out of *this* cavern, at all events, 'Nkos. There is an opening about the height and width of a man in the wall over there, and it leads direct into a tunnel which I followed for about a quarter of a mile, in order to try to find out where it led, but it seems to go on and on without coming to an end, and, as the floor of the cavern is sloping downward the whole time it seems to me that this may perhaps be the tunnel leading to the river, of which I have heard. At any rate, *Baas*, it is quite worth our while to make an attempt to get out that way ; for it looks as though the tunnel led *somewhere*, and we shall, even if unsuccessful, die very much more happily while trying to escape than if we were to stay here waiting for death to come to us."

"True, Tambusa, true !" returned Hugh heartily. "We had better start at once, before the Amazulu get wind of our absence and come in search of us. Stay you where you are, and Soye and I will collect the provisions and water, and hand them to you, together with a few assegais, the rifle, and the ammunition. Then, when we ourselves get through, we will divide the burden, each man taking his proper share. But, Tambusa, supposing this tunnel of yours *does* lead to the Umvolosi, about

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what distance shall we have to go, in the bowels of the earth, before we reach daylight and the river?"

The *isanuisi* thought hard for a few moments, and then replied: "Well, 'Nkos, the Umvolosi is a good many miles away from here by the ordinary route, quite ten I should think; but it may be that this tunnel, if it does indeed prove to have an outlet on the river, will not be so long; at any rate I hope not."

"All right, Tambusa," said Marchmont; "stay you here, then, whilst Soye and I make all the preparations." So saying he took Jack's hand and led him to the outer cave, where they found the faithful Soye still busily observing the movements of the Zulus through his loophole; and in a few seconds he too had been informed of the new discovery, and of the plans for escape. The man was delighted, for he had looked forward to nothing better than a painful death, within a very short time; and then the three of them, with a glow of renewed hope now animating them, set themselves to the task of getting ready for their momentous journey.

First of all a selection of assegais was made and passed through the opening to Tambusa; then all the provisions in the cave were made up into three parcels, and also passed through, the gourd of water coming last, and being handled with extreme care. Then, everything being in readiness, Hugh sent Soye on in front to join his brother, while he himself took a last survey of the enemy's encampment in order to see how matters stood there. To his great satisfaction he saw no sign of immediate movement on the part of the Zulus; they had already built fires, and were cooking meat which had meanwhile been killed and brought in by the hunters attached to the party, while the shields and assegais, piled haphazard among the rocks and boulders,

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showed that the savages had no intention of attacking again, at least for some hours, but that they had made up their minds to hold a great feast in full view of the besieged, who, they naturally supposed, must be entirely without food.

Then, having completed his investigations, the young officer filled his pockets with what remained of the ammunition for the Martini carbine, and slinging the gun over his back, took Jack's hand and led him to the spot where Tambusa and his brother were waiting for them. It was no difficult matter for the boy to squeeze through the tiny aperture which had proved barely large enough for the passage of the Kafir's naked bodies ; but with Hugh it was different, although he, too, at last got through with the loss of nothing more than a little skin, and five minutes later the reunited fugitives stood together in the huge cavern of whose existence they had all been ignorant an hour ago. Tambusa then struck a match and lit a large resinous pine-branch which he had brought with him, and the vast hall was at once illuminated with a weird, lurid glare which, although bright, was still quite insufficient to show the dimensions of the chamber in which they were standing. For several minutes the little party gazed round, struck dumb with wonder and amazement at the almost unearthly beauty of their surroundings ; for the cavern, filled as it was with huge stalactites and stalagmites from which the water was constantly dripping, presented the appearance of some wonderful fairy palace ; the light, falling on the numerous drops of water giving them the appearance of a shower of glittering, many-coloured jewels.

It was a sight such as a man may see but once during a lifetime, while others never behold such a scene at

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all ; but, beautiful as it was, they all felt acutely that their lives were still in jeopardy, and after a few minutes spent in gazing at this marvellous work of nature buried in the depths of the earth, Hugh gave the order to advance, himself leading the way with the blazing torch, after having first taken the precaution to roll a heavy rock in front of the opening by which they had entered the cavern, that, should the Zulus eventually find the spot, they might not be able to get through in pursuit.

Then, crossing the cavern, they plunged into the tunnel of which Tambusa had rightly spoken as being only the width and height of a man, and consequently the little party were obliged to go forward in Indian file. The path was extremely slippery, being both wet and overgrown with moss generated by the damp, besides which, as the Kafir had warned them, it sloped gradually downward, so that progress was both slow and dangerous but, to their great relief, they encountered no obstacles and it really began to look as though the tunnel would eventually lead them into safety. There was a decided draught coming from in front of them too, for the flame of the torch was continually blown backward, so that Hugh felt sure there must be an outlet somewhere ahead.

They had been going steadily forward for about an hour, and must have traversed fully three miles of the tunnel, when, suddenly, Hugh uttered a loud shout and threw himself backward, at the same time clutching frenziedly at the smooth walls of the passage. "Halt ! halt !" he called, "stay where you are ; do not move a step forward for your lives, *there is a great pit in front of us, stretching right across the path !*"

It seemed to every one of the little party as though their hearts had suddenly stopped beating, for if

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their way were thus blocked it meant that there was nothing for them to do but to retrace their steps and die miserably in the upper cavern ; and each of them tried to look over Marchmont's broad shoulders in order to see what the obstacle looked like.

"Don't move, don't move," shouted Hugh anxiously ; "the floor slopes down in a smooth lip to the edge of this pit, and if we lose our footing we shall slide helplessly to destruction. Sit down, all of you ; it will be safer, and we can then think of what is to be done." Obediently to his command the three lowered themselves gingerly to the ground, and in this position, by leaning carefully forward they could see over his shoulder along the sloping floor of the tunnel, which showed bright and wet in the light of the torch for about four yards ahead, and then ended suddenly in—nothingness.

"Phew !" whistled Marchmont, wiping his forehead, which had become very damp, "that was a narrow squeak ! If I hadn't had my eyes fixed on the floor at that particular moment I should have stepped on to the sloping part and slid, helpless, into the pit. But, by heavens ! we must do something ; it is no use our waiting here ; I must get to the edge of that pit somehow or other, and see, if I can, how deep it is, and if there is any chance of our being able to get across." He thought for a few minutes, with his head in his hands, and then said : "There is only one way to do it, and that is, by means of a length of rope ; but unfortunately we have none, so we must do the best we can without it. I will take off my vest and shirt and tear them into strips, and, Jack, you must let me have yours."

So saying, he quickly divested himself of the garments he had mentioned, while Jack did the same ; and then,

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after tearing them into strips, Hugh proceeded to tie the strips together ; the whole, when bound together, forming a rope of quite respectable length. He then directed Tambusa and Soye to hold firmly on to one end of the rope, and, taking the torch in his left hand, proceeded to work his way cautiously along the floor of the tunnel, supporting himself by the rope with his right hand ; and, after one or two slips by which he very nearly let go his hold of both torch and rope, he reached the edge of the pit and looked down into it. To his great relief, he found that it was only about twenty feet deep, instead of being, as he had feared, practically bottomless ; but nevertheless it presented a very formidable obstacle. He noticed however, that, although the near side walls of the pit were as smooth as glass, the opposite side had a few small projections of rock which might serve to give some sort of foothold, and in a second he had considered the whole situation, and had decided how to act.

Crawling slowly and painfully back to the party, he quickly outlined his plan to them, and then lowered himself back to the edge of the pit. The rope by which he was supporting himself was about thirty feet long, and there was just about six feet of it hanging over the lip of the chasm now, so Hugh would have to lower himself away to the end of it, and then drop, in order to reach the floor, for the men who were supporting him dared not approach any closer in order to let him have more rope, because the path shelved so steeply that they would then be unable to retain their foothold under the strain of his weight.

"Now, then, boys, hold on tight," exclaimed Hugh, having worked his way backward to the edge of the pit, "I am going over. Then, when I call out, lower the

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umfaan as far as you can, and I will catch him when he lets go. Tambusa must come next, Soye letting him down as far as he can, and Soye himself must first throw down the rope and then jump, we others in the bottom breaking his fall as well as we can. Are you ready? Very well, then, I am going."

With these words the young man lowered himself over the smooth edge of the chasm, leaving the torch above him so that the remainder of the party might have light enough to see by, and then, hand over hand, went down the rope until he felt the end of it between his fingers. The pit was about twenty feet deep and the rope hung six feet over its edge, therefore Hugh, hanging by his hands, had only about another six or seven feet to drop; but in the thick darkness it seemed as though, when he let go, he would never cease falling. The drop was however, nothing like so severe as he had expected it would be, although it jarred his wounded leg frightfully, but the next moment he found himself standing unhurt at the bottom of the pit, shouting to the Kafirs to let Jack down. In response to his orders he saw the flickering light of the torch approaching the lip of the pit, and a moment afterward the boy was lowered down until Hugh could reach his feet with his hands; he then told him to let go, and eased his feet down on to his shoulders, after which he easily lowered him to the ground. Next came Tambusa, who also landed in safety, but Soye had a very narrow escape of breaking his neck as, having no one to lower him down, he was obliged to jump, and having miscalculated his distance, leaped too far, coming down with a crash, head first on to Hugh and Tambusa who were waiting to break his fall. It was a lucky thing for the man that they were there, or he would assuredly have had his skull broken; but as it

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was, the only thing that happened was that all three of the men were somewhat severely bruised.

However, they were all down safely, and the next thing to be thought of was how to get out on the other side. By the light of the still blazing torch the fugitives could see the projections of rock which Hugh had noticed and it did not take Tambusa very long to swarm up the side, carrying the improvised rope with him ; and once there, the rest was easy, since the floor of the tunnel was perfectly flat on top, and the *isamusi* was therefore able to let the whole length of the rope down to those below. Soye went up next, trembling in every limb from his recent unnerving experience ; and, with the two Kafirs hauling from the top, and his brother supporting him from underneath, Jack was very soon placed in safety, Hugh coming last out of that fearsome pit.

Having now all reached the top, the four adventurers formed once more into position, Hugh again leading the way, and continued their apparently unending march down the tunnel, which now began to take on an even greater steepness than before, so that it was sometimes only with the greatest difficulty that they could keep their footing. This continued for about ten minutes, until Hugh began to think that they must be nearing the centre of the earth, when, suddenly, his straining ears caught the sound of rushing water, and presently the path began to slope *upward* sharply. For quite a couple of hundred yards the travellers could hear the water foaming and roaring past, apparently not very far above their heads ; and the volume of sound was such that they were nearly deafened.

Presently however, the rushing, roaring noise of water ceased, and the upward slope of the cavern became

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less steep, until it was running nearly level once more. They then came suddenly to a turn in the passage, the first bend that they had encountered since they had left the sorcerer's cave, and Hugh, who was leading, caught sight of a tiny glimmer of light, far away in front of him.

"We are *saved* ! *SAVED* !" he shouted joyously ; "there is light ahead ! Cheer up, young 'un" he added to his brother, "we shall soon be out of this ghastly place now. Come along, boys ; put your best leg foremost ;" and with hearts beating high the fugitives redoubled their speed, coming out, twenty minutes later, into a clump of thick undergrowth through which, for a few moments, they could see nothing. Then Hugh pulled aside some bushes, and there, right before them, lay the mighty Umvolosi, rolling along seaward in a smooth, swift-flowing current which showed that there must have been rain up-country. For a few minutes Tambusa stared blankly at the river, as though he hardly realised where he was ; then, in a voice full of amazement he exclaimed : "Why *Inkos*, we have come out on the Umvolosi, sure enough ; but we are on the far side of the stream ; we must have passed right under its bed while we were walking through the last part of the tunnel. What if the rock walls had given way—ugh !"

The first thing to be done now was to locate their position ; and before very long Tambusa recognised where they were, and told them that there was a village about half a mile away, down stream, where it would be possible, perhaps, to procure a canoe in which they could voyage through the Zulu country to the sea much more safely than by going overland. There should be a fort at the river-mouth, too, where, could they only reach it, all their troubles would be over. So Hugh determined to wait until nightfall before setting out for

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the village ; and in the meantime they availed themselves of the opportunity to secure a hearty meal, of which they stood greatly in need, and finally a few hours' sleep.

They awoke just as darkness was descending on the face of the earth, and to their vast satisfaction, the night was cloudy, consequently the light of the moon was not likely to betray them. Hugh and Tambusa, leaving Soye to look after Jack, stole softly away to the village, where, by a piece of great good fortune, they were able to secure a canoe without being discovered in the theft. It was then a comparatively easy matter to paddle back to the place where Soye and Jack had been left, and by nine o'clock that evening the fugitives were paddling rapidly down stream, on the face of whose waters they fondly hoped that they would find safety. And for the first time for many weeks the poor, worn-out little boy slumbered peacefully in his brother's arms, confident in the power of the latter to protect him from all harm.

CHAPTER XX

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL"

HARDLY had the fugitives succeeded in passing unobserved the village from which they had stolen the canoe, when the strain under which they had all been labouring for so long being a little relaxed, the Kafirs began to manifest unmistakable signs of an inclination to fall asleep ; and although Hugh strove to reanimate them by telling them that they were still very far from being out of danger, and that it was necessary for them to put as many miles as possible between themselves and the village before morning dawned, he found that notwithstanding the few hours rest that they had been able to snatch, the poor fellows were so absolutely dead-beat that physical exertion was rapidly becoming an impossibility with them. Therefore, making the best of the situation, and telling himself that they would doubtless be all right again after a few hours' rest, he ordered them to lay in their paddles and take what rest they could in the bottom of the boat, while he himself raised Jack gently in his arms until the child leant against his breast, leaving him with one arm free, so that with a paddle in his free hand he was able to guide the canoe down the centre of the stream, the current being amply sufficient to take her along without other motive power at the rate of about three miles in the hour. The carbine he placed, ready loaded and to hand, on the thwart beside him, and, steering with one hand and supporting his brother with the other, the young Englishman sat, silent and watchful, in the stern of the little craft, praying with all his heart that nothing might now

occur to snatch from him the chance of safety which already seemed to be within measurable distance.

For several hours Marchmont sat, grim and motionless until, about two o’clock in the morning, the clouds cleared away, and the moon came out, much to his vexation ; for although it was a highly dangerous business to navigate the little craft in the darkness, it was a much more dangerous matter to be exposed, in the full glare of the moon, to whatever eyes might happen to be on the lookout at that particular time ; and Hugh every moment expected to hear the gruff challenge floating across the Umvolosi which should tell them that the party had been discovered—for the broad river wound its way right through the most thickly populated part of Zululand. But still the canoe with its single watcher at the helm drifted along with the swift current and the moon shone down on a land which, so far as he could make out, might have been quite destitute of inhabitants.

About half an hour later, however, the river began to narrow down considerably, much to Hugh’s trepidation, for, with the closing together of the banks, the current naturally became swifter, and it began to be a rather difficult matter to keep the canoe in a straight course ; moreover the banks were now becoming steep and thickly wooded, so that a whole *impi* of Zulus might be concealed there without the fugitives becoming aware of the fact until it was too late, while in several places the steeply sloping banks, clothed with dense tropical undergrowth, seemed almost to overhang the tiny canoe, so close aboard were they on either hand ; indeed there were spots where a fairly active man might almost if not quite have leapt from the bank into the boat. Hugh did not at all like this state of affairs, for should the

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party be attacked while in this narrow portion of the river the enemy would have them at their mercy, being able to riddle them with assegais and pot-leg at close range ; and to his consternation he saw, when the canoe turned the next bend of the river, that these conditions apparently continued for several miles.

Yet minute after minute slipped past, and still no sign of any living thing put in an appearance, save a buck or two, and a prowling leopard coming down to the river to drink ; and Hugh was beginning to breathe more freely, hoping that, after all, they would reach the broader stretches of the Umvolosi undiscovered, when something occurred which increased his forebodings and alarm tenfold. He was half sitting, half lying in the stern of the canoe, supporting Jack with one hand while he steered with the other, and the deep murmur of the great river had insensibly induced in him a feeling of drowsiness, when he suddenly became wide awake, every sense tingling and on the alert, for he had distinctly heard a stealthy, crackling noise proceeding from the bank upon his left hand, and although the sound ceased almost as soon as it had begun, he seemed to know instinctively that it had not been caused, this time, by any prowling animal in search of prey, but by a human being, who, he felt sure, was also in search of prey—the sort of prey to be found, for instance, in a canoe floating down the river ; and he also knew at once, as well as though he had himself been the observer, that he and the party under his care *were being watched*.

His first instinct was to seize his carbine and to fire into that part of the jungle whence the noise had seemed to proceed, but, even as he stretched out a stealthy hand for the weapon, he checked himself, for he had no means of knowing how many of the watchers there were and

as a Zulu seldom hunts alone it was practically certain that there was a number of the enemy present who would attack immediately if Hugh showed any signs of having discovered their presence, when everything would, in this narrow part of the river, be against the fugitives. No, thought the young officer to himself, it would be fatal for him to make any aggressive movement just here, he must sit still and wait patiently, and hope that the Zulus would not attack until the river widened a little, or until there was some chance that a sudden, quick dash for safety might take them out of range before the enemy guessed what they were about ; but at the same time Marchmont felt it a very difficult matter to sit still in the stern of the boat, knowing that at any moment he might feel an assegai quivering between his shoulders, and he gathered his brother still more closely in his arm in order to shield him as much as possible from the shower of spears should the Zulus suddenly make up their minds to attack.

But as the young man made that movement of protection, he fancied he heard a soft, mocking laugh from the bushes on his left hand, and so startled was he by the sound that he almost swung round in his seat before he remembered that he must pretend to be unaware of any danger, unless he was prepared to bring matters to a climax. But the next moment he had forgotten all about the mocking laugh ; for there now came to his ears another sound, a dull, roaring, booming noise, that could only proceed from one thing—a cataract ; and his blood chilled at the thought of the new danger that they were all thus placed in ; for, if the banks were indeed peopled by Zulus the fugitives had only two alternatives before them, namely to land—and be mercilessly massacred directly they set foot

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on shore, or to drive over the waterfall and be drowned. In a moment he leaned forward and shook the two Kafirs who, waking with a start, very nearly upset the boat. To them he quickly detailed his suspicions, and the fact that they were approaching a cataract, and sought their counsel as to what had better be done.

After thinking for a few seconds, during which the roar of the falls had become perceptibly louder, Tambusa suggested that they should run in toward the bank, as though to land, in order to "draw" the enemy, for if any Zulus were really concealed on the bank, they would at once show themselves upon the fugitives attempting to land. To this Hugh agreed; and, as the river was now broadening out considerably and the current was already becoming much stronger, he at once turned the boat's head toward the shore, aiming to strike the bank at a point about a quarter of a mile away. But even as he did so he caught a slight rustling noise from among the brushwood on the bank, and the next moment there broke on his ears the awful war-whistle of a large number of Zulus, that long-drawn 'i-j-j-j-i' which sends a horrid thrill through the breast of any man who has ever fought against them; and Marchmont knew that his worst suspicions were confirmed. Indeed a large number of the enemy suddenly put in an appearance, ranging itself along the shores of *both* banks of the river, so that it was impossible for the fugitives to find any unoccupied spot where they might land. It truly seemed now as though death were staring them in the face, and Hugh's heart bled for his sleeping brother.

"There is only one thing for it, boys," he said breathlessly to the Kafirs, "we must turn the boat's head and try to paddle her back up-stream until we

come to some place where the Amazulu cannot reach us ; but even that is a forlorn hope, I fear, because I don’t think we shall be able to make much, if any, headway against this current.”

No sooner had Marchmont spoken than his commands were obeyed, and the bow of the canoe turned up stream. But his forebodings were soon confirmed, for, paddle as they might, it was evident that, far from making any progress against the stream, they were being slowly carried down stern foremost toward the cataract, the booming of the tumbling water becoming every moment louder in their ears, while the exultant shouts of the savages told them only too plainly that they were aware of the fate which awaited the little party of fugitives.

“ Paddle, you scamps, *paddle !* ” roared Hugh, himself setting the example, and for a few brief seconds the boat held her position on the surface of the river. Sweat poured from off the men’s foreheads and almost blinded them, while their muscles seemed like to crack ; but it was all useless labour, and the canoe presently began to dart away down the Umvolosi like an arrow.

“ It’s no use,” said Hugh, throwing down his paddle ; “ we must either go over the falls or surrender to the Zulus, and I, for one, prefer to risk the cataract, although death is practically certain either way. Still, let us die by drowning, since die we must, rather than under the torture. Turn the boat’s bow round, Tambusa, and head her for the cataract.”

Hardly a minute seemed to have passed before Soye cried : “ Look out, *Baas*, and be ready ; we shall be over the falls in a minute now. Good-bye, *Inkos* ; you have been a good master to me, and I wish I could have lived to serve you and the *unfaan*.”

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"Thank you, my boy," returned his master, "I wish you could; I would never have forgotten your fidelity and loyalty to me in the time of my trouble. Good-bye, boys, God bless you; you are both thoroughly good sorts!"

The voyagers, with drawn, set faces, were now close to the brink of the roaring cataract, and a few seconds more would see them all in eternity. Hugh thought, when Jack, who had been looking on, with wide-opened eyes, suddenly turned to him and exclaimed: "Hugh, Hugh! did you hear that? It sounded to me like *English voices*. Someone shouted a command, I am sure; and I thought I also heard the sound of horses' hoofs."

"No, sonny, I heard nothing," said Marchmont, tenderly, thinking that his privations had made him delirious. "I fear you are mistaken; for there are no Englishmen within a hundred miles of us. Ah! look out," he said, throwing his arm round Jack, "we are going! Good-bye laddie, good-bye!"

There was a hideous roaring and thundering of water, rendering the air tremulous with sound, amid which the exultant cries of the Zulus could be faintly heard, and then came a choking shower of spray, accompanied by a headlong, swift, downward plunge, followed by a terrific shock, a splash, and both the canoe and its occupants were over the fall and in the midst of the foaming swirling water at the bottom. But fortunately they fell clear of the rocks, and the next moment were being whirled, breathless and battered but still alive, down the rapids, Hugh still holding the shrinking form of his brother and valiantly striving to keep the child's head above water.

Then occurred what Hugh always calls a miracle.

An English voice called out from the bank, “ look out for this rope, you people in the water ! ” And the next moment the rope splashed into the turmoil close to Hugh’s head, while half a dozen sturdy troopers dashed shoulder-deep into the stream and helped the fainting, drowning people to the bank, where presently they were deposited in a dripping, breathless string, sorely bruised and battered, but living, ay, and what was more, in the hands of friends, for the men who had seen the catastrophe and afforded such timely help were none other than a company of the Zululand Mounted Police, who had come up country in pursuit of one of the rebel *indunas*, and who were providentially on the spot where they were so urgently needed.

There is very little more to tell ; for the fugitives’ adventures and perils were now over. Jack seemed none the worse for his experiences, though he stood in great danger of being spoilt by the soldiers, who seemed as if they could not do enough to make him forget the horrors he had been through.

Hugh’s first business on his return to Eshowe was to report himself to the Colonel in command there, to give him a full account of all his adventures, and to request a fortnight’s leave in order to take his brother over the border and place him with friends in Greytown. The permission to do so was readily granted, but it was coupled with an injunction that he was on no account to return to duty until his wounds were properly healed ; the young man therefore, having first placed Jack in safe hands, went into the hospital. And there, the reaction following upon what he had lately gone through took place, bringing on a fever which prostrated him for nearly two months. And during the height of the fever, when the delirium was at its worst,

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and when in imagination he was enacting some of his most stirring recent experiences all over again, many of his scarcely-healed wounds broke open afresh ; and for a time Hugh Marchmont's life was despaired of. But the young man, though wasted to the shadow of his former self, was tough as whipcord ; moreover, he had never played any tricks with his constitution ; therefore after a long and very trying illness he began slowly to mend, and at length, after a sojourn of nearly four months in the hospital, emerged into the world once more not only with his fever cured, but also with all his wounds healed.

But the war was practically at an end by this time, and most of the volunteers had already been dismissed to their homes ; thus Hugh was free to return to Katana, where after two years of sedulous labour he found his mining operations progressing to such an extent that he determined to put in a manager and return with his brother to England.

This proposal met with the small boy's fullest approval ; and, after winding up all his affairs in Katana, Marchmont went down to Durban by bullock-waggon, there embarking on board the Union liner *Moor* for England, which he reached a month later, and where he now lives, at a lovely little place among the Devonshire hills ; while Jack, a schoolboy at Dulwich, never tires of telling to his envious chums his adventures while in the hands of the Zulus.

THE END

